THE MASTER'S WORD

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IN

THE EPISTLES AND GOSPELS

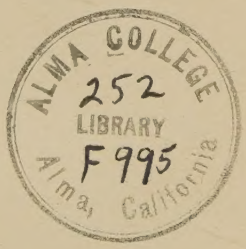
Sermons for all the Sundays and the Principal Feasts of the Year

BY

REV. THOMAS FLYNN, C.C.

"Master, What must I do to possess eternal life?"
(St. Luke x. 25.)

VOLUME I



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TO THE

MASTER'S MOTHER

"OF FAIR LOVE

AND

OF FEAR

AND

OF KNOWLEDGE

AND

OF HOLY HOPE"

(Ecclesiasticus xxiv. 24)

PREFACE

How sweet to the ears and how consoling to the hearts of the disciples was the voice of Jesus! How eager they were to listen to it! What wonderful effects it produced!

Peter and his companions labored in vain all the night, but in the morning, at the Master's Word, they achieved a miraculous success. The hearts of the disciples on the road to Emmaus burned within them while Jesus spoke, though they knew Him not. Thousands were converted by the first sermon of St. Peter, for they received his preaching not as the word of man, but as the Word of God.

To the Church Our Lord has said: "He that heareth you heareth Me." (Luke x. 16.) May her voice be ever recognized by all her children as the selfsame MASTER'S WORD.

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INTRODUCTION

ON ONE occasion when our Divine Master was going to Jerusalem "a certain lawyer stood up tempting Him, and saying, Master, what must I do to possess eternal life? But He said to him: What is written in the law? How readest thou? He answering, said: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind: and thy neighbor as thyself. And He said to him: Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live." (Luke x. 25–28.)

Every true Christian must ask the same question, must seek similar instruction. Our Divine Master has already provided the answer, and our Holy Mother the Church, in His name and by His authority, is constantly engaged in making known to us the various details of His teaching.

This the Church accomplishes in a variety of ways, but principally by setting before us each Sunday and feast-day some special lesson selected from the Holy Word of God itself.

In the following pages an attempt has been made to set forth in a simple and orderly manner a brief account of these lessons, as found in the Epistles and Gospels of the Sundays and principal Feasts throughout the year. They consist of a consecutive series of sixty discourses, which naturally resolve themselves into six parts of ten each, as will be clearly seen from the Table of Contents. In every case the Epistle and Gospel are taken together, both referring to the same aspect of the subject treated of, one being the complement of the other.

PART I

THE WORK

"The kingdom of heaven is like to a householder, who went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard."

(Matt. xx. 1.)

I

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

THE START

"It is now the hour for us to rise from sleep."
(EPISTLE: Rom. xiii. 11–14.)
"The kingdom of God is at hand."
(GOSPEL: Luke xxi. 25–33.)

TO-DAY we are beginning a new ecclesiastical year. As you are aware, the Church calendar is different in many respects from that of the State. The latter extends from the beginning of January to the end of December—a purely mechanical arrangement. But, as in everything she does, the Church has a deep and beautiful meaning in her own system. In her calendar we see reflected the whole life of our Blessed Saviour. All her feasts and fasts are arranged in such a way that they represent in graphic form the history of mankind—the fall of Adam, the promise of the Redeemer and its fulfilment in Jesus Christ, together with the principal events in the life, sufferings, and death of our Divine Master.

With this idea in view she begins her year with the season of *Advent* (which means "com-

ing"), four weeks before Christmas. This period represents the four thousand years which intervened between the promise of the Redeemer, made to our first parents after their fall, and the actual coming of Our Lord at Christmas. During that long period all the holy patriarchs and prophets, and even the heathen world, longed and prayed for the coming of the Just One and ardently desired to see that Blessed Day.

Then comes *Christmas,* that season of joy, peace, and good will, which speaks so eloquently of the love and goodness of God toward men. Immediately afterward comes the *Epiphany* (which means "manifestation"), during which we commemorate the coming of Our Saviour to the Gentiles, represented by the three Magi, or wise kings, who, led by the star of Bethlehem, came from the East to adore Him and present their offerings of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The next great feast in the Church calendar is Easter Sunday, on which is celebrated Our Lord's glorious resurrection from the dead and His triumphant victory over death and hell. But our holy mother the Church does not allow us to forget that Christ entered into His glory only after His sufferings and death. "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and

so to enter into His glory?" says St. Luke. (xxiv. 26.) And so she prepares us for the proper celebration of that grand festival by making us imitate, as far as we can, Christ's own preparation for it. He began His public life by fasting for forty days in the desert. So the holy season of Lent is destined to prepare us by prayer and fasting for the worthy reception of the fruits of the life, sufferings, death, and resurrection of Our Saviour. This season begins on *Ash Wednesday;* and, as it is a time not only of fasting and prayer but also of serious and solemn thought and self-examination, the Church begins early to remind us of the spirit in which we should enter upon it by putting on her penitential garb three weeks before, that is on *Septuagesima* Sunday—*seventy* days before Easter.

Having, then, by the worthy reception of the sacraments at Easter, risen to a new life with Christ, we celebrate with special fervor the coming of the Holy Ghost at *Pentecost* (*fifty* days after Easter). On that and on the following Sundays the Church continues to teach those many lessons which the Holy Spirit of Truth impressed upon the minds of the apostles. One of the principal ways in which she accomplishes this is by presenting for our serious reflection each Sunday and feast-day two

specially selected extracts from the Holy Scriptures. The first of these is called the *"epistle"* because it is generally taken from the *epistles*, or letters, of St. Paul or of some other apostle who wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost to the different churches of the first Christians. Extracts from these letters were usually read in public by the early Christians before the celebration of the Divine Mysteries, after the custom of the Jews, who always began the Sabbath service in the synagogues by the reading of extracts from Moses and the prophets. The second portion is taken from one or other of the accounts of the Life of Our Lord as written by the evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and hence called the *Gospel,* or *good news.*

The present arrangement of the Epistles and Gospels was made by St. Jerome, at the command of Pope Damasus, in the fourth century. It is formed on a fixed and definite plan and has a definite spiritual significance, provision being made for each season, feast, and fast of the year by the presentation of appropriate passages from Holy Scripture, "in the selection and collocation of which," according to even non-Catholic writers, "a richness of variety and an exquisite delicacy of religious and esthetic instinct has been strik-

ingly shown." This applies not merely to the individual extracts, as appropriate to each feast and season, but also to the beautiful sequence of their teaching, the whole collection forming together a consecutive series, each Epistle and Gospel being closely connected not only with each other but with those that precede and follow, in their order.

The Epistle is read before the Gospel, as well to follow the ancient custom as to commemorate the practice of Our Lord Himself, who was accustomed to send some of His disciples before Him to those places He was about to visit. It always contains some important lesson appropriate to the season of the year, the event or feast celebrated, or all taken together. This lesson is announced by the Sacred Writer, as it were, *in theory,* and is followed by its confirmation *in practice* by some account in the Gospel of a work or miracle of the Master Himself, and sometimes by His own very words. These selections follow in consecutive order the various seasons, feasts, and fasts of the ecclesiastical year, each with its own special warning, pleading, encouragement, or exhortation, the one bearing out and complementing the other; all combining to fill our hearts and minds with the teaching and spirit of THE MASTER'S WORD.

We should, therefore, make a careful study of each holy extract every Sunday and feast-day, listening with attention and devotion to the explanation given by the priest; for, though St. Paul says, "What things soever were written, were written for our learning: that through the patience and the comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. xv. 4.); and though, according to the same great Apostle, "All Scripture inspired of God is profitable" (2 Tim. iii. 16.), yet we must remember that according to Holy Scripture itself there are contained therein "certain things hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unstable wrest . . . to their own destruction." (2 Peter iii. 16.) It is not enough, then, to read them or hear them read. We must, as far as we can, seek an intelligent appreciation of their meaning. How familiar to every good Catholic ought to be the many precious lessons contained in the Epistles and Gospels in their prayer-book, and yet how little good they have derived from them, and how little they know about them, although they have been reading them all their lives!

Let us, therefore, on this first Sunday of Advent, begin the New Year with a sincere desire to enter into the spirit of Holy Church, saying with the Prophet: "But as for me and

my house, we will serve the Lord." (Jos. xxiv. 15.) It is to this resolve that she exhorts us in the Epistle and Gospel of to-day. She tells us in the Gospel, in the very words of our Divine Master Himself, of the terrors of the Last Day, when "there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations by reason of the confusion of the roaring of the sea and of the waves, men withering away for fear and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world." And she reminds us of the General Judgment which follows, when we "shall see the Son of Man coming in a cloud, with great power and majesty," to judge the living and the dead, for she is convinced of the value of that salutary advice of Holy Scripture: "In all thy works remember thy last end and thou shalt never sin." (Ecclus. vii. 40.)

"That day of wrath, that dreadful day" (Soph. i. 15.) may now seem to us to be far distant; but not so, for it is at hand for each of us. "The kingdom of God is at hand" and "our generation shall not pass until all these things be done," "till all things be fulfilled." Nay, it is "nigh even at the doors" (Matt. xxiv. 33.), for, as far as we are concerned, our fate on that dreadful day will be decided by our actions now. "As a man lives so shall he

die," and "in what place soever the tree shall fall, there shall it be." (Eccles. xi. 3.) And we shall die much sooner than we expect, for Christ has warned us that "the day of the Lord shall so come, as a thief in the night" (1 Thess. v. 2.), and according to St. Peter, "one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter iii. 8.), who concludes by asking: "What manner of people, then, ought you to be in holy conversation and godliness?" (iii. 11.)

The answer is clearly given in every word of the Epistle of to-day, which we should well weigh and consider: "It is now the hour for us to rise from sleep," it says. We have indeed been asleep in the past, unmindful of all that most concerns us. Let us now awake, for "the night is past and the day is at hand." Instead of waiting for that terrible day, when "the trumpet shall sound and the dead rise again" (1 Cor. xv. 52.), and the voice of the Angel shall be heard crying out that awful summons, "Arise, ye dead and come to judgment," let the voice of Holy Church ring in our ears and awake us to a true sense of our position: "Rise, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead: and Christ shall enlighten thee." (Eph. v. 14.) Let us enter into her spirit and strive to be animated with her senti-

ments. We are to prepare during Advent for the coming of Our Lord at Christmas. The prophets of old longed for His coming. "Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the Just; let the earth be opened and bud forth a Saviour" (Isaias xlv. 8.), said Isaias. But that privilege was denied to them. We are more fortunate than they, for, like holy Simeon, "our eyes have seen His salvation." (Luke ii. 30.) The Jews of old served Him with fear, but we serve Him with love. He has called us to be children of His Kingdom, members of His Holy Church, having "made us worthy to be made partakers of the lot of the saints in light," and "hath delivered us from the power of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love." (Col. i. 12–13.)

Let us, then, "cast off the works of darkness" of our sinful habits and "put on the armor of light" of true repentance and bright virtue, so that, instead of being afraid to meet the Just Judge amid the awful surroundings of the Last Day, we can joyfully look forward to meeting him as Our Saviour at Christmas, as gentle, kind, and loving as the Divine Infant in the stable at Bethlehem.

II

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

THE HOPE

"That you may abound in hope and in the power of the Holy Ghost."

(EPISTLE: Rom. xv. 4–13.)

"Behold, I send My angel before Thy face, who shall prepare Thy way before Thee."

(GOSPEL: Matt. xi. 2–10.)

AFTER the solemn warning which we received last Sunday, no doubt many of us have already entered into ourselves and seriously considered our position with regard to Almighty God. Many of us, too, let us hope, have now entered upon the new life which we then resolved to begin with all earnestness, and, "knowing the season," have also entered into the spirit of the Church during this holy time—that of preparation for the coming of Our Lord at Christmas, as well as for His second and final advent on the Last Great Day.

But there may be some who have waked from sleep with consciences so grievously

burdened with the memory of their past sins that they have neither the courage nor the strength to face the ordeal of beginning an entirely new life: yet who are fully conscious of their miserable position and are frightened at the thought of standing before the judgment-seat of an angry God. It is well, indeed, if they experience such sentiments of fear, for Holy Scripture states in many places that this is a sign of the approach of repentance and God's mercy, as well as a most efficient help to prevent a relapse into sin. Thus we find in the Book of Proverbs: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (i. 7.); in the Book of Ecclesiasticus: "No evils shall happen to him that feareth the Lord, but in temptation God will help him and deliver him from evils" (xxx. 1.); "With him that feareth the Lord it shall go well in the latter end, and in the day of his death he shall be blessed" (i. 13.); "To fear God is the fulness of wisdom" (i. 20.); "The fear of the Lord driveth out sin" (i. 27.); "Ye that fear the Lord, wait for His mercy." (ii. 7.) And St. Luke says: "His mercy is to them that fear Him." (i. 50.) Hence, though "compassed with infirmity" (Heb. v. 2.), involved in dangerous occasions of habit, person, or circumstances, such unfortunates should

have great hope and confidence in the desire of Almighty God to remove all their difficulties and His power to accomplish it. For, according to God Himself, "Though a sinner do evil a hundred times and by patience be borne withal, it shall be well with them that fear God." (Eccles. viii. 12.) And again, "A faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners." (1 Tim. i. 15.)

So whilst this beautiful message of hope which the Church announces in the Epistle and Gospel to-day is meant for all, it is especially meant for them. And whilst last Sunday she endeavored to arouse us from sleep by portraying in God's own words the terrible consequences of sin, to-day she holds forth hope and encouragement by telling us that "what things soever were written, were written for our learning, that through patience and the comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope," and that even if a miracle were necessary in order to restore sinners to their duty and repentance, God's arm has not been shortened and His mercies have not ceased. "Behold, the hand of the Lord is not shortened that it cannot save," says the prophet Isaias, "neither is His ear heavy that it cannot hear." (lix. 1.) And this day's Gospel relates that

Our Lord Himself said to the disciples of St. John as a proof to all of His divinity and of His great love and compassion for men: "Go and relate to John what you have seen and heard. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the Gospel preached to them."

In the Epistle, St. Paul addressed himself particularly to the Gentiles in order to make known to them the desire of Almighty God that not only His own chosen people, the Jews, should be saved, but that even those who till then knew Him not were to be brought to the knowledge and love of their Creator. And so he encouraged them by telling them of the various promises of Holy Scripture so that they might "glorify God for His mercy," "rejoice with His people," and hope for everything from Him who was to rise up to rule and save them.

At all times man was inclined to forget God. Ever since the sin of Adam the devil seemed to get possession of his soul. So wicked had he become even in the time of Noe that God repented of having created him and sent the Deluge to destroy him. "I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth . . . for it repenteth Me that I have

made them." (Gen. vi. 7.) And even after that terrible warning men again sank into vice and corruption. "They were," as St. Paul says, "filled with all iniquity, malice, fornication, covetousness, wickedness; full of envy, murder, contention, deceit, malignity; whisperers, detractors, hateful to God, contumelious. proud, haughty, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, foolish, dissolute: without fidelity, without affection, without mercy." (Rom. i. 29–31.) What a terrible picture! And yet God did not abandon them but still held out hope of mercy and came Himself to save them.

The history of mankind is the history of the soul of each of us. "Man when he was in honor did not understand," says the Psalmist. (Ps. xlviii. 13.) Neither did we. By the saving waters of Baptism we were delivered from the power of Satan, raised to the dignity and given the privileges of "Christians and children of God and heirs to the kingdom of heaven." But we, too, proved unfaithful to our trust—we, who had never sat in darkness or in the shadow of death, but who have walked even from the beginning in the light of God's presence on the holy mountain as children of His holy Church. Our guilt is, therefore, much greater than that of those who had not

so many and such powerful helps to guide and guard them.

But even for us does God in His goodness and mercy hold out hope, and that in the person of His own Divine Son. "God," says St. Paul, "who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, last of all in these days hath spoken to us by His Son." (Heb. i. 1, 2.) So not only to them, but also to us, and to all poor sinners of every age, does the mercy and goodness of God extend. "It is the will of God that all men should be saved," says Holy Scripture (1 Tim. ii. 4.), and Christ Himself says: "I am not come to call the just but sinners." (Matt. ix. 13.) Hence, when Our Lord told the disciples of St. John to relate the miracles they had witnessed, He was affording a proof not merely to them, but also to us, of the fulfilment of that prophetic promise of Isaias which had been made so long before for the comfort and consolation of all those whose hearts were faint, and whose souls were weighed down by sin and its consequences. "Say to the faint-hearted: Take courage and fear not; behold God Himself will come and will save you. Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped; then shall the lame

man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall be free." (Isaias xxxv. 4–6.)

This prophecy is to receive its complete fulfilment in the redemption and regeneration of us, "upon whom the ends of the world are come." (1 Cor. x. 11.) But if we are to share in these great privileges we must employ the means of reconciliation and sanctification pointed out to us by the Church to-day in the words of Almighty God Himself. In the first place, then, we must unite in prayer and patience and holy charity, "with one mind and with one mouth glorifying God." Hence we must never absent ourselves from Holy Mass on Sundays without grave reason; we should be ever anxious also to assist at the other Offices of the Church, such as Vespers, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, and the meetings of the Confraternity. Apart from our obligation of public worship, attendance at these meetings and membership of such sodalities are the best means of hearing and seeing those things which are calculated to remind us of our spiritual condition, and point out to us our duties to God, to our neighbor and to ourselves, and to supply us with the necessary motives for hating sin and overcoming the enemies of our salvation.

And God Himself will help us. "Behold,"

He says in the Gospel, "I send My angel before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee." Thus the teaching and example of St. John the Baptist are held up for our practical imitation by Jesus Christ Himself who testifies of him that he was "a prophet, yea, and more than a prophet, for there hath not risen among them that are born of women a greater than John the Baptist." (Matt. xi. 11.) By God's grace we have heard his teaching and we have been consoled and comforted by the hope and promise of eternal life.

What, then, was his example? Our Lord tells us that he was not "a reed shaken by the wind." Hence we must be firm in our resolution, strong in our faith, constant in hope, and persevering in virtue. Neither was he "clothed in soft garments," but "the same John," says St. Matthew, "had his garment of camels' hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins: and his meat was locusts and wild honey." (Matt. iii. 4.) Hence we must restrain our appetites, control our desires, give up the false joys and sinful pleasures of this world, and practise self-denial and mortification. The holy season of Advent, with its prayer, fasting, and penance, will help us to do this if we enter rightly into the spirit of it and ask Almighty God to help us. Let us

prepare, then, for a good confession and a worthy reception of Holy Communion at Christmas.

Of ourselves we can do nothing, but with God all things are possible. It may require a miracle of grace to convert and sustain us. Our whole life may be one great leprosy of sin; but He who said: "Be thou made clean," will restore us to spiritual health and strength and render us once more fit to associate in spiritual conversation with "those who are of the household of the faith." (Gal. vi. 10.) Hitherto we may have been deaf to the voice of God calling on us to return to Him. But He who said to the deaf man: "Be thou opened, and immediately his ears were opened" (Mark vii. 34, 35.), will give us "ears to hear those things that are to our peace." We may be in the habit of constantly relapsing into sin, now rising and now falling, lame indeed. But God will restore to us the firm step and youthful stride of our first fervor in the path of virtue. We may be dead and even corrupting in the very grave of sin. But He who said to the widow's son, "Young man, arise," and to Lazarus "Come forth" will restore us also to a new life in His grace and love.

"To-day, then, if you shall hear His voice,

harden not your hearts" (Ps. xlv. 8.), but turn to Him in love and repentance. He comes to us at Christmas with all the tokens of friendship and forgiveness, and will "fill you with all joy and peace in believing."

III

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

THE DANGER

"Let your petitions be made known to God." (EPISTLE: Phil. iv. 4–7.)

"There hath stood one in the midst of you whom you know not." (GOSPEL: John i. 19–28.)

THE Church is ever a kind and indulgent mother to her children, always with loving care and maternal solicitude watching our steps and helping us to walk in the way of the Lord. Last Sunday she endeavored to console and comfort us by pointing out our grounds for hope in God's mercy and His desire to save us, lest we should become discouraged and "faint in the way." (Mark viii. 3.) She also pointed out that whilst such hope of mercy exists for us, there is the corresponding necessity on our part of making use of the means placed by God at our disposal for obtaining it. And our attention was specially directed to the duties of prayer and mortification.

To-day, lest we should imagine that the way of penance was a sad and difficult one, she bids us to rejoice and be glad: "Rejoice in the Lord always: again I say, rejoice." It is not of the essence of penance or of holiness to make those who practise them unhappy or sorrowful. We may fast and pray and mortify ourselves and yet be glad. Indeed, Our Lord Himself warns us of this very common error. "When you fast," He says, "be not like the hypocrites, sad." (Matt. vi. 16.) Nay, true happiness, consisting as it does of an easy mind and an upright conscience, is only to be found in self-denial; for, as action and reaction are equal and opposite, as pleasure and pain are correlative, so are happiness and mortification. He who has the keenest appreciation of sensible pleasure has also the acutest suffering from physical pain, and he who denies himself the most has the greatest enjoyment out of what he allows himself.

The man of sin is never happy. He may indulge in merriment of a kind, but the ready jest and the loud laugh are no indication of true happiness within, for "there is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord God." (Isaias lvii. 21.) On the other hand, he who practises the Gospel precepts and walks in the way of the Lord has real happiness of heart and soul,

for he alone has true peace, that peace which the world cannot give, "the peace of God which surpasseth all understanding and keeps his heart and mind in Christ Jesus."

Be not discouraged, then, by the apparent difficulty of the task before you. "Be nothing solicitous," for God will help you and guide your steps if you only ask Him. So, "let your petitions be made known to God," for it is by prayer alone that we can obtain help and grace as well as consolation and peace.

It is remarkable how often we are reminded by the Church in her exhortations and by Holy Scripture generally of the necessity and power of prayer. To-day our attention is called to it not merely as a necessary means of salvation but as an essential condition of our happiness even in this life. And, in order that we may make use of so great a means of grace with constancy and perseverance and with the proper dispositions, we are warned in the Gospel of the greatest cause of its neglect or failure—want of thought. "With desolation is all the land made desolate, because there is none that thinketh in the heart," says the prophet Jeremias. (xii. 11.)

Want of consideration causes failure of prayer—if it can be called prayer without it —by preventing the mind and heart from pay-

ing proper attention even to the meaning of what we say, and from paying proper respect to Him from whom we expect assistance. And how can we expect Almighty God to attend to our prayers when we do not attend to them ourselves? "You ask and receive not," says Christ, "because you ask amiss" (James iv. 3.), that is, without the proper dispositions; and again, "This people honoreth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me." (Mark vii. 6.) "Before prayer," then, "prepare thy soul and be not as one that tempteth the Lord thy God," for "they that fear the Lord will prepare their hearts and in His sight will sanctify their souls." (Ecclus. ii. 20.)

But above all, want of consideration causes the neglect of prayer and thus entirely deprives us of our great means of salvation. For if we do not often seriously ask ourselves, like the holy prophets, "What shall I say when the Lord will come to judge?" and "What shall [we] do when the Lord shall begin to examine?" (Ecclus. ii. 17.), we shall never realize our state of imperfection or know our wants, and consequently will never ask for the graces necessary for our salvation. This is the great cause of all the wickedness of the world, of all the misery which sin causes in the

soul and which made the prophet exclaim: "With desolation is all the land made desolate, because there is none that thinketh in the heart." (Jer. xii. 11.) Moreover, if we do not frequently "think in the heart," we shall become spiritually blind to the most important truths of religion, unmindful of the most serious warnings as to the punishment of sin, careless and ignorant of the things which matter most both in this world and the next. Yes, "he that loveth God shall obtain pardon for his sins by prayer, and shall refrain himself from them" (Ecclus. iii. 4.), whilst there is "woe to them that are fainthearted, who believe not God: and therefore they shall not be protected by Him." (Ecclus. ii. 15.)

Truly "the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." (Luke xvi. 8.) What care and attention does the man of the world bestow upon his business! How he keeps an exact account of his financial position, studies new projects, reviews the past, foresees and provides against difficulties and arranges every detail that makes for success! But how little concerned we are about the greatest affair of all—our immortal soul's salvation! Truly "Vanity of vanities and all is vanity," save loving God and serving Him alone, "for what shall it profit a man, if he gain

the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark viii. 36.)

Yes, as in the affairs of this life, "evil is wrought by want of thought as well as by want of heart," so in the affairs of the next life want of consideration on the great truths of eternity is the cause of as much spiritual damage as the want of the desire to profit by them. An extraordinary proof of the blindness which darkens the soul through such neglect is given in to-day's Gospel. The Jews, though well aware of the many prophecies concerning the Redeemer, and though eye-witnesses of the many miracles which He performed as proofs of their fulfilment in Him, yet did not recognize Him as the promised Messias. They were not ignorant of the things which had been said concerning Him, for they asked St. John if he were "the Prophet," or "Elias," or "the Christ." And the Divine Precursor upbraided them, saying: "There hath stood one in the midst of you, whom you know not." Had they considered seriously they could not have failed to recognize Jesus as the promised Messias; but they were so careless, so filled with their own conceit, so blinded by prejudice, that in spite of all they had seen and heard He was hidden from their eyes as their Lord and Sav-

iour, thus literally fulfilling the prophecy of Isaias: "Israel hath not known Me and My people hath not understood." (Isaias i. 3.)

Let us take care, therefore, lest we also through want of due consideration should reject the special graces of this holy season.

The Jews were excused by Our Lord even when He was dying on the Cross when He said: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke xxiii. 34.) But we can not hope to be so excused, for, as the prophet says of us: "There is not any other nation so great, that hath gods so nigh them as our God is present to all our petitions. What other nation is there so renowned that hath ceremonies and just judgments and all the law?" (Deut. iv. 7, 8.) So let us follow the advice of Holy Scripture: "In all thy works remember thy last end and thou shalt never sin" (Ecclus. vii. 40.); "Keep thyself therefore and thy soul carefully. Forget not the words that thy eyes have seen, and let them not go out of thy heart all the days of thy life." (Deut. iv. 9.)

So, "in everything with prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your petitions be made known to God." For, as it is by the consideration of divine truths that we are led to practise constant watchfulness over our-

selves and thereby realize our many necessities, so it is by constant and persevering prayer that we obtain relief and strength and consolation: "For who hath called on Him, and He despised him?" says the Preacher, speaking of "the compassionate and merciful God." (Ecclus. ii. 12.) How grateful we ought to be to the Father of all mercies that He places within our reach this wonderful and easy means of salvation! How glad we ought to be that He encourages us to approach His throne, telling us that "we ought always to pray and not to faint" (Luke xviii. 1.), and that if we ask for anything we are sure to obtain it: "Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you." (Luke xi. 9.)

During the holy season of Advent we have need of very special grace, for "the Lord is nigh" and it is our duty to make special preparation for His coming. "They that fear the Lord will prepare their hearts and in His sight will sanctify their souls," says Holy Scripture. (Ecclus. ii. 20.) Prepare, then, "the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Isaias," is the command given to us by the Church to-day. This command was given to the Jews by St. John. But they neglected it. Let us not share their fate but be wise in time. We have

many obstacles to overcome; our path is beset with many difficulties. But if we look ahead with the bright eyes of faith we shall not miss the way. If we keep God's law before our minds we shall not stumble. If we think seriously of the dangers that surround us we shall be led to ask for help and will place all our confidence in God's love and mercy. "Son," says the Preacher, "when thou comest to the service of God, stand in justice and in fear: and prepare thy soul for temptation. Humble thy heart, and endure: incline thine ear and receive the words of understanding. . . . Believe God, and He will recover thee: and direct thy way and trust in Him." (Ecclus. ii. 1–2, 6.)

Thus, "in our meditation a fire shall flame out" (Ps. xxxviii. 4.) which shall be for us a guiding light. Thus we shall "make straight the way of the Lord" and go forth with joyful steps to meet Him, having thus sure cause for "rejoicing in the Lord always," possessing here for a time and in heaven forever the only source of true happiness and the only haven of real peace, Jesus, "the way, and the truth, and the life." (John xiv. 6.)

IV

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

THE PROMISE

"He that judgeth me is the Lord."
(EPISTLE: 1 Cor. iv. 1–5.)
"All flesh shall see the salvation of God."
(GOSPEL: Luke iii. 1–6.)

DURING the past few weeks we have been taught many lessons to make us holier and happier. And whilst we have by God's grace been striving to put those lessons into practice, we can not have failed to realize how difficult and dangerous a path we are treading. With all our courage and earnestness in setting out, with all our hope of succeeding, and with all our joy in persevering, we must come to the conclusion arrived at by holy Job when he said "the life of man upon earth is a warfare and his eyes are like the days of a hireling." (Job vii. 1.) We meet so many dangers in our journey toward the kingdom of heaven—from within and from without, from friends as well as enemies—that it requires all our faith, all our hope and all our charity to

look beyond the things of this world and seek for rest and safety only in the world to come where, as holy Job says, "the wicked cease from tumult and the wearied in strength are at rest." (Job iii. 17.)

But our "kingdom," like that of our Divine Master, "is not of this world" (John xviii. 36.), and we seek the reward not of a servant or of a hireling but "the reward of inheritance" (Col. iii. 24.), as children of the Father and heirs to His kingdom, depending with lively faith, firm hope, and ardent charity upon the fulfilment of the promise: "The Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels: and then will He render to every man according to his works." (Matt. xvi. 27.)

So the Church to-day once more encourages us by telling us in the Epistle that we are not to place much value on the judgments of men, whether friends or enemies, nor even to trust to our own opinion of ourselves. "Neither do I judge my own self," says St. Paul, "but He that judgeth me is the Lord." And therefore she once more urges us to harken to the voice of the Divine Precursor "preaching the baptism of penance for the remission of sins," and promising anew the reward of our perseverance—the sight of our Blessed Redeemer com-

ing to us not as a judge but as a Saviour—"and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

St. Paul thought very little of the opinions of men. He was too familiar with their thoughtless, unjust, and erroneous pronouncements on the actions of others to care anything for them; and he was far too conscious of his own inability to judge himself to rely even on his own conscience for an index of his position with Almighty God. "It is a very small thing to be judged by man's day," he says: and again: "I am not conscious to myself of anything, yet am I not hereby justified."

In the first place, when we condemn others we do so thoughtlessly, for we never know, and still less realize, all the circumstances. God alone knows the true measure of guilt. He alone knows the temptation, the struggling, the weakness, the amount of responsibility. Perhaps if we who are so ready to condemn others were placed in the same circumstances ourselves, and subjected to the same temptations we should be defeated with still greater loss, if not entire spiritual destruction. "Consider thyself," says St. Paul, "lest thou also be tempted." (Gal. vi. 1.) How ingenious we are at discovering excuses for our own weakness and sin, and how equally ingenious we are in eliminating or weakening all evi-

dence in favor of another! Hence Our Lord Himself says: "Judge not according to the appearance." (John vii. 24.)

And if we judge even our friends in this manner, how much more unfavorably shall we judge our enemies. In the former case natural affection is inclined to restrain somewhat the formation of an unfavorable opinion, but in the latter case our prejudice blinds us and our want of charity makes us glad to think and say the worst. How many unfortunates have been condemned in open court and sentenced to imprisonment, even to death itself, whose entire innocence was afterward firmly established, notwithstanding the strength of what seemed at the time to be the overwhelming proof of the circumstantial evidence! How little capable are we, then, to form an opinion on facts not too clear, circumstances concealed or unknown, prejudice strong and reasoning entirely erroneous. "How long will you judge unjustly?" says the Psalmist. (Ps. lxxxi. 2.) Let our resolution be not to judge at all unless we judge mercifully. "Judge not, that you may not be judged," says St. Matthew, "for with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again." (Matt. vii. 1, 2.)

And how are we judged ourselves? Do we not grow indignant at the slightest accusation made against us? It may be true or it may be false. If it be true, we are probably far more guilty than we are even considered to be, for who knows the warnings, the lights, the graces we have received from God in order to keep us in the path of virtue? Truly God alone knows the real extent of our guilt beyond what we may have to acknowledge before men. Even our good actions, which gain praise and renown in the sight of men, may be vitiated in the sight of God by motives of self-interest, self-complacency, vainglory, or worse. In that case "we have received our reward." (Matt. vi. 2.) Sometimes when we merely do our duty, and that perhaps not as well as we might, we seek for praise from men and even glorify ourselves: but for such we "shall not have a reward of our Father who is in heaven." (Matt. vi. 1.) God alone knows the secrets of the heart, which are often strangely concealed even from our own eyes, so that "man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or hatred." (Eccles. ix. 1.) We should therefore pray with the Psalmist: "Who can understand sins? From my secret ones cleanse me, O Lord; and from those of others spare Thy servant." (Ps. xvii. 13, 14.)

It is a common error to suppose that everything we consider to be right is always pleasing to Almighty God. We must of course always act according to our conscience. But there is such a thing as a false conscience, which often endeavors to justify what is really criminal in the sight of God. As Holy Scripture says, "There is a way which seemeth just to a man; but the ends thereof lead to death." (Prov. xiv. 12.) And St. Augustine says: "The testimony of conscience is upon many occasions a false and destructive guide."

Hence we have great need of circumspection. In the first place we should pray for light to know ourselves so that we might realize the gravity of our own sins and imperfections and the poverty of our own virtues and motives, by the testimony of a good conscience. As St. Matthew says, "The light of thy body is thy eye. If thy eye be single thy whole body shall be lightsome, but if thy eye be evil thy whole body shall be darksome." (Matt. vi. 22, 23.) And the eye of the soul is conscience. In the next place we ought to refrain from judging others or examining their motives. If we were all as good as we think we are we should be very good indeed. And if we were all as bad as we seem to be to every ignorant and prejudiced witness we should be

very bad indeed. Leave all these things, then, in the hands of God, for "the Lord will come who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts."

Having thus obtained a clear view of the way of the Lord, let us go forward with hope and perseverance, seeking to please God rather than men. Let no obstacle prevent you from continuing the good work which you have so well begun. "Bring forth fruits, therefore, worthy of penance . . . for now the ax is laid to the root of the trees." (Matt. iii. 10.) "Every mountain and hill shall be brought low"—every sin must be acknowledged and repented of, the mountains of mortal sin, the hills of venial sin: and every occasion of sin, no matter how dear, must be avoided or removed. "And if thy right eye scandalize thee," says Christ, "pluck it out and cast it from thee. . . . And if thy right hand scandalize thee, cut it off and cast it from thee. For it is expedient for thee that one of thy members should perish, rather than thy whole body be cast into hell." (Matt. v. 29, 30.) "Every valley shall be filled up"—every separation between God and the soul, caused by sin and its consequences, must be filled up by pious thoughts, fervent prayers, and good

works. "The crooked shall be made straight" —every evil or unworthy motive must be eliminated and good intentions take their place. "The rough ways shall be made plain"—we must not only break down the mountains of mortal sin and the hills of venial sin, but even smaller faults must be rooted out; for, "He that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little." (Ecclus. xix. 1.) All this we can accomplish by the help of God's grace, "looking for the blessed hope and coming of the glory of the great God and Our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus ii. 13.), who was pointed out by St. John the Baptist as "The Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world." (John i. 29.)

Thus we shall have prepared the way of the Lord according to His own directions. Whether we shall have pleased men or not need not trouble us. We may be ill-judged by our friends as well as by our enemies. Our most faithful and unselfish efforts may meet with failure in their eyes. We may, on the contrary, obtain far more credit than is really due to us. We may even "think ourselves to be something, whereas we are nothing" (Gal. vi. 3.); but God will set everything right, for, "He that judgeth is the Lord," and "the Lord is nigh." By His grace

we shall be prepared to meet Him by receiving Him worthily in Holy Communion on Christmas morning. Then we shall spend a truly happy Christmas, not merely a merry one. For, though we may, with all other Christians, partake of the good things of this life with joy and thankfulness in honor of our Saviour's birth, we must ever remember that it is possible to be merry without being happy. "I said in my heart," says the Preacher, "I will go, and abound with delights, and enjoy good things. And I saw that this also was vanity. Laughter I counted error: and to mirth I said: Why art thou vainly deceived?" (Eccles, ii. 1, 2.) Mirth is merely a transitory feeling of our lower nature, a thin veneer of apparent happiness. But true happiness is a state or condition of soul, solid and permanent under the circumstances, but finds no place where sin lurks.

May our Christmas, then, be, as the idiom of the "Island of Saints" expresses it, "a good Christmas" and it is sure to be a happy one: for, having prepared the way of the Lord according to the directions of our Divine Master Himself, it will be a sure token of what we may expect when "the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels and will render to every man according to his works." (Matt. xvi. 27.)

V

CHRISTMAS DAY

THE REWARD

"The grace of God our Saviour hath appeared."

(EPISTLE: First Mass: Titus ii. 11–15.)

"And we saw His glory."

(GOSPEL: Third Mass: John i. 1–14.)

AT LAST the Great Day has arrived! After all the promises and prophecies, all the prayers, sighs, and anxieties of four thousand years, "the grace of God our Saviour hath appeared," the Expected of Nations has come, the Redeemer promised to our first parents now dwells amongst us!

When He came all the world was at peace, as had been foretold long before—"And in the last days . . . they shall turn their swords into plowshares and their spears into sickles: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they be exercised any more to war," said the prophet Isaias (ii. 4.). And it was fitting that it should be so, for He was to be the Prince of Peace not only to the Jews

but to all the nations of the earth and to the souls of all men.

In Bethlehem, an insignificant little village, He was to appear: "And thou, Bethlehem Ephrata, art a little one among the thousands of Juda: out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be the ruler in Israel," the prophet Micheas had foretold long before. (v. 2.) And so it came to pass, for we are told in the Gospel that "In those days there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that the whole world should be enrolled. This enrolling was first made by Cyrinus, the governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee out of the city of Nazareth into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his espoused wife, who was with child. And it came to pass that while they were there, her days were accomplished, that she could be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him up in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds watching and keeping the night-watches over their flocks. And behold an angel of the Lord stood by

them, and the brightness of God shone round about them, and they feared with a great fear. And the angel said to them: Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people; for this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. And this shall be a sign unto you: you shall find the infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army, praising God and saying: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will."

How unexpected was the manner of His coming! How totally different from all the pre-conceived notions of men was the long-expected King who was to save His people from their sins and reign over their hearts for ever! The Jews thought He would come surrounded by all the pomp and splendor of worldly sovereignty, wielding a mighty power which should make His chosen people feared and respected among all the nations. They looked only toward His temporal sway, and in their spirit of worldliness forgot the more important spiritual influence He was to exercise over the souls of the peoples of all ages and of all nations. He was to change the whole face of the world and its maxims, and

show to all that the things of this life which appeared most important were nothing but a positive hindrance to success in the world to come.

So it was not to the great and mighty that His coming was announced, but to a few poor shepherds keeping the night-watches over their flocks. They were the poorest of the poor, the simplest of the simple, such as we should least expect to be made the first recipients of such a stupendous announcement.

Thus did Our Lord at the very beginning give an indication of that policy and of those ideas, so contrary to the opinions of the world, which He afterward so completely vindicated in His own divine life and character. "Blessed are the poor" was to be His text. Humility and meekness were to be His examples. And suffering was to be His portion.

The Gospel narrative goes on to say that "the shepherds said one to another: let us go over to Bethlehem, and see this word which has come to pass, which the Lord hath showed to us. And they came with haste, and they found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in a manger. And seeing, they understood of the word that had been spoken to them concerning this child." Thus in the very beginning also did Christ bear out in His own divine

person the principles of poverty, humility, and self-denial that He was to preach and practise, by His mode of announcing His presence on earth through the poor, the humble, and the suffering. He was the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the Master of the universe, the only-begotten Son of the Father, "the brightness of His glory, and the figure of His substance, and upholding all things by the word of His power, making purgation of sins, sitting on the right hand of the majesty on high." (Heb. i. 3.) And yet He deigned to be born in a poor stable, in the darkness and misery of a cold winter's night, "wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger, because there was no room for Him in the inn." But still He proved to the shepherds, and through them to all, by the miraculous events which accompanied His birth—the brightness of God shining around them, the voice of the angel making known the joyful tidings, and the multitude of the heavenly army chanting the praises of God—that He was indeed the Lord of Glory, the King of heaven and the Redeemer of men, for, "they understood of the word that had been spoken to them concerning this child."

In honor of this wonderful mystery the Church to-day celebrates three holy Masses, with a separate Epistle and Gospel for each.

In the first Mass she celebrates the *temporal* birth of Our Saviour, a birth, as we have seen, entirely opposed in its circumstances and surroundings to what the world would naturally expect. In the second Mass she tells us of His *spiritual* birth in the souls of men, as shown by its results in the hearts of the shepherds, who "returned glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen." And in the third Mass she draws our attention to His *eternal* birth in the bosom of His Heavenly Father, in that sublime Gospel of St. John: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him: and without Him was made nothing that was made. In Him was life and the life was the light of men. . . . And the WORD WAS MADE FLESH and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory (the glory as it were of the only-begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth." In the Epistles of the Masses we are told in a general way of the advantages we have derived from the coming of Christ and of the obligations that are thereby entailed on us of "denying ungodliness and worldly desires" and of "living soberly, justly, and godly in this world."

With the whole Christian world we rejoice to-day at the outward manifestation of our Divine Lord in His temporal birth at Bethlehem. We share in the happiness which the "good tidings of great joy" caused in the hearts of all who heard them, and we express our good wishes to one another, exchange mutual tokens of love and friendship, and show in every way we can a spirit of peace and good will toward all men. But something more is necessary. Like the shepherds we must "go over to Bethlehem and see the word that is come to pass which the Lord hath shown to us." We must learn the lessons which our Infant Saviour preaches to us from the manger; and whilst we praise and glorify God for His mercies toward us, we must put into practice those maxims which He so eloquently strives to impress upon us by His example. These are the lessons of humility, poverty, self-denial, and charity.

Honor and glory is the aim of the mere worldly-minded. Those in whose sight they lie covet distinctions of every kind—titles, positions, fame. Those who have no hope of them spend their time in making little of them and affecting to despise them, whilst at the same time they seek all the praise and notori-

ety they see within their reach in their own sphere. They want all to know that they are deserving of far more consideration than they get and that honor and glory are no good in any one but themselves. Do we try to obtain all the credit that we think due to us, on the un-Christian assumption that we must stand up for our rights? Do we with an easy conscience receive praise which we know in our hearts is not really due to us? Or do we care for praise at all? This is a difficult matter for most people to discover, for there are some who actually boast that they care not what others think about them and yet are most sensitive to the least unfavorable criticism. Others really do not care what people think of them, but only because they have lost all sense of shame and responsibility. But there is no virtue in this. The test must be, then, a spiritual one in Christ. If we truly love God we shall not be disturbed about the opinions of men. We shall harbor no resentment in our hearts against those who speak ill of us or deprive us of favors, but seek to improve ourselves for God. Provided we do God's will we shall have an easy mind and shall never miss, much less run after, the worthless, artificial tinsel of human praise or glory.

Yes, Jesus possessed all things and was Master of the riches of the universe, for, "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." (Ps. xxxiii. 1.) He abandoned everything for our sakes and took upon Himself the lot of poverty. He thereby elevated, ennobled, and sanctified that state which till then was looked upon as a disgrace and a calamity. Of the poor was Our Saviour born. To the poor did He first reveal Himself. And to them did He give the first proofs of His love, as they were afterward the first objects of His tender care and compassion, receiving from His own divine lips that consoling promise: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. v. 3.)

Let us, then, strive to imitate our Divine Master in His spirit of poverty and self-denial by patience in all our sufferings. He will help us, for He knows our weakness, "being in all things like as we are, without sin." (Heb. iv. 15.) And as we rejoice to-day in memory of His advent amongst us, let us make our joy solid and lasting by imitating His example: "for unto this are you called," says St. Peter, "because Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps." (1 Peter ii. 21.) Thus this holy festival will be for us a time of grace and a

foretaste of that happiness in store for us when we shall possess Jesus Himself as our great reward, and see "the glory of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

VI

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

THE WARNING

"God sent His Son . . . that He might redeem them who were under the law."

(EPISTLE: Gal. iv. 1–7.)

"This child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel."

(GOSPEL: Luke ii. 33–40.)

Now that Christmas has come and that we are still engaged in the joyful celebration of the divine mysteries in honor of the coming of our Infant Saviour, we can truly say with holy Simeon that "our eyes have seen His salvation." (Luke ii. 30.) We have rejoiced with the holy angels and the poor shepherds at the "good tidings of great joy," and we have joined with "the multitude of the heavenly army" in divine praise and worship, "when the goodness and kindness of God our Saviour appeared," for "His grace hath appeared to all men." (Titus ii. 11.)

Yet amidst all this peace and joy our ever-watchful mother the Church strikes a note of warning. She tells us to-day in the Epistle

that we are no longer servants or children, but masters of our spiritual inheritance; that although when an heir is a child he is treated by his guardians after the manner of a servant and must in all things obey their directions, yet when he comes of age he enters into the full possession of his property, rights, and privileges. So, as the Jews served God in a spirit of fear under the old law, when Christ became man they did not, as St. Paul says, "receive the spirit of bondage again in fear, but the spirit of adoption of sons" (Rom. viii. 15.), becoming "joint heirs with Christ." (viii. 17.) Thus we, too, were once, as it were, "serving under the elements of the world" but were redeemed by Baptism and cleansed by Penance from the slavery of Satan and the stains of sin. We have been raised to the dignity of God's true children and worship Him as our loving Father. But as some of the Jews forgot God and returned "to serve again their weak and needy elements," they were warned of their danger by St. Paul in the words of the Epistle of this Sunday. And the Church warns us to-day of our own danger in the very same words.

But she more strongly warns us in the Gospel by calling our attention to those awful words of Holy Simeon who, after taking the

Divine Child in his arms and expressing his thanks to Almighty God that he had lived to see that happy day, said to His holy Mother: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel." What a pity it seems that such a note of discord should be struck amidst the beautiful harmony and peace which should possess the hearts of all faithful Christians during this holy season! But, alas, it is necessary, for, though the angels sang on Christmas night "Peace on earth to men of good will," it seems that notwithstanding all the happiness, there should be men of evil will and wicked intention who care not for spiritual joy and who neither "seek after peace nor pursue it." (1 Peter iii. 11.)

"God sent not His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved by Him" (John iii. 17.), says Holy Scripture. We all know the immense, the infinite love of God for sinners and His desire to save them. We know all that Our Lord Jesus Christ suffered for them, even "swallowing up death that we might become heirs of life everlasting" (1 Peter iii. 22.), as St. Peter expresses it. How, then, can it be said that our loving and merciful Infant Saviour is "set for the ruin" of any one? Our Lord Himself gives us the answer by explaining in many

places of Holy Scripture that if He pays the price of our redemption and purchases for us mercy, grace, and salvation, we must on our part correspond with His efforts and make use of the means of salvation placed by Him at our disposal. That otherwise it were better for us that He had never died to save us, that He had never made known to us by His prophets and apostles, and with His own divine lips, our duty to Him of faithful and persevering service.

According to St. Paul, God punishes man for want of faith "because that which is known of God is manifest in them. For God hath manifested it unto them . . . so that they are inexcusable." (Rom. i. 19.) And Christ Himself says: "If I had not come and spoken to them they would not have sin: but now they have no excuse for their sin." (John xv. 22.) So it may be said with truth that it would have been better for such not to have known God at all, not to say to have enjoyed His special favors, as Our Lord Himself said of the traitor Judas: "It were better for him if that man had not been born" (Mark xiv. 21.), and of the wicked cities of Corozain and Bethsaida: "Then began He to upbraid the cities wherein were done the most of His miracles, for that they had not done penance. Woe to thee,

Corozain, woe to thee, Bethsaida, for if in Tyre and Sidon had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in you, they had long ago done penance in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you." (Matt. xi. 21.)

Christ is in this sense, therefore, "set for the fall of many" who through their own fault either refuse to believe in Him or are unwilling to carry out His commands as given to them by His teaching and example.

Faith, then, is necessary in the first place, for, as St. Chrysostom says, "it is the gate of life and ground of eternal salvation." "Without faith it is impossible to please God," says St. Paul, "for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and a rewarder to them that seek Him." (Heb. xi. 6.) And Our Lord Himself lays down that "he that believeth not shall be condemned." (Matt. xvi. 16.) How many there are who through wilful spiritual blindness see not the importance of the truths of salvation. "The veil is upon their heart." St. Paul says. (2 Cor. iii. 15.) How many on account of sinful passions have "their senses made dull" (iii. 13.), and do not "behold the glory of the Lord with open face" (iii. 18.), as they should whose "eyes have seen His salva-

tion" and who should, like Moses, "by faith rather choose to be afflicted with the people of God than to have the pleasure of sin for a time." (Heb. xi. 25.) Truly "the wrath of God cometh upon the children of unbelief" (Col. iii. 6.), and Christ, who came to save them, must condemn them.

But faith alone is not sufficient for salvation, for, "even as the body without the spirit is dead; so also faith without works is dead," says St. James (ii. 26.); and again, "Thou believest that there is one God. Thou dost well: the devils also believe and tremble." (ii. 19.) How many Catholics there are who know their God, their religion, and their duties and who yet lead careless and sinful lives. They sin often, they pray seldom or never, neglect the sacraments, miss Mass, have no care for the moral training or spiritual welfare of their children—unfaithful husbands, careless fathers, unworthy wives and mothers, disobedient and wicked children. They have the outward appearance of good Christians but, like the Pharisees of old, they are full of rottenness and corruption within. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites," said Christ, "because you are like to whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear to men beautiful, but within are full of dead men's bones and of all filthi-

ness. So you also outwardly appear to men just, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." (Matt. xxiii. 27–28.) So they may even think and speak as if they were fulfilling the law of the Lord, deceiving even themselves. But "not every one that saith to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven," says Christ. (Matt. vii. 21.)

Our faith, then, must be enlivened by charity, which is "that pure and sincere love of God by which we love God above all things for His own sake and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God." "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels," says St. Paul, "and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And if I should have prophecy and should know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I should have faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." (1 Cor. xii. 1–2.) Therefore the love of God must rule all our actions and influence all our thoughts. It is absolutely necessary for salvation, for it alone leads us to the practice of true religion, by virtue of which we faithfully discharge all the duties of our state of life and

make the best use of all those graces and privileges which our Blessed Saviour purchased for us by His life, sufferings, and death. "If you love Me," says Christ, "keep My commandments." (John xiv. 15.)

And what wonderful graces and privileges these are! What punishment we deserve for abusing or neglecting them! Isaias compares the soul so well cared for by Almighty God to a vineyard lovingly attended to by its master. "My beloved had a vineyard on a hill in a fruitful place. And he fenced it and picked the stones out of it, and planted it with the choicest vines, and built a tower in the midst thereof, and set up a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and ye men of Juda, judge between me and my vineyard. What is it that I ought to do more to my vineyard that I have not done to it? Was it that I looked that it should bring forth grapes and it hath brought forth wild grapes? And now I will show you what I will do to my vineyard. I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be wasted: I will break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down. And I will make it desolate: it shall not be pruned, and it shall not be digged: but briers and thorns

shall come up: and I will command the clouds to rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel: and the man of Juda his pleasant plant: and I looked that he should do judgment, and behold iniquity: and do justice, and behold a cry." (Isaias v. 1–7.)

Yes, we have received everything necessary to make us saints, but we are not holy, although God "gave Himself to us that He might cleanse to Himself a people acceptable, a pursuer of good works" (Titus ii. 14.), "hath poured forth upon us abundantly the Holy Ghost" (ii. 6.), and "hath spoken to us by His Son." (Heb. i. 2.) Let us then be wise in time, for "unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required." (Luke xii. 48.) The season of Christmas is not yet over. The divine hands of our Infant Saviour still hold gifts and graces for us. If we receive them with gratitude and love they will be our salvation and sanctification and not a cause of our spiritual destruction. It is sad to think that Jesus should be "set for the fall" of any one, but it is consoling to feel that He is "set for the resurrection" of all those who sincerely desire to know, love, and serve Him here on earth, for theirs is the certain "hope of life everlasting, which God, who lieth not, hath promised." (Titus i. 2.)

VII

THE CIRCUMCISION

THE OBJECT

"Who gave Himself that He might redeem us." (EPISTLE: Titus ii. 11–15.)

"His name was called Jesus." (GOSPEL: Luke ii. 21.)

OUR whole life on earth and all our work for God has for its object what our Divine Lord came upon earth to merit for us by His grace and to teach us by His example —the salvation and sanctification of our immortal souls. And as He began at His very birth and by the circumstances which surrounded it, to attain that object, so, as soon as possible after His birth He made the first great act of personal sacrificial offering to His Eternal Father by shedding His precious blood for us.

Almighty God had made a covenant, or agreement, with Abraham, by virtue of which the patriarch and his descendants were to submit to a certain rite called "circumcision" (a cutting of the flesh), and thereby, in view of

the future merits of the promised Redeemer, were to be relieved of the eternal consequences of original sin and consecrated as the chosen ones of God. According to Holy Scripture, "God said to Abraham: And thou, therefore, shalt keep My covenant, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is My covenant which you shall observe between Me and you, and thy seed after thee: All the male kind of you shall be circumcised. . . . An infant of eight days old shall be circumcised . . . and My covenant shall be in your flesh for a perpetual covenant." (Gen. xvii. 9–13.)

The rite of Circumcision, then, was instituted on account of sin. But Christ had nothing to do with sin, except to atone for that of men by the willing sacrifice of Himself. But in order to show His respect for the law, as an example to us and as an atonement for our sins, He obeyed the command to the very letter and submitted to the ancient rite. The circumstances are briefly related in the Gospel: "After eight days were accomplished that the child should be circumcised, His name was called Jesus." As in the New Law it is on the occasion of the ceremony of Baptism that a child formally receives its name, so in the Old Law it was on the occasion of the ceremony of Circumcision that the name was given.

Thus Our Lord became our great High Priest and Mediator by shedding His own most precious blood for our salvation. "Christ," says St. Paul, "being come a high priest of the good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation: neither by the blood of goats, or of calves, but by His own blood, entered once into the Holies, having obtained eternal redemption." (Heb. ix. 11–12.) Thus was He so appropriately called Jesus, a name which signifies "Saviour," and which was specially selected by God even before His Divine Son came upon earth. "His name was called Jesus, which was called by the angel before He was conceived in the womb."

Now that the Old Law has passed away and that Our Saviour has given us in the New Law the substance instead of the shadow and the reality instead of the figure, Circumcision has been replaced by the sacrament of Baptism of which it was a mere type or figure. By the reception of Baptism "we are cleansed from original sin, made Christians and children of God and heirs to the kingdom of heaven." But at the same time in view of the great favors we have received through the grace and kindness of our dear Redeemer, we have all

the more reason to be anxious about our spiritual circumcision: for, even under the Old Law the mere ceremony of cutting the flesh was of no avail unless accompanied by the proper spirit. "You are circumcised," says St. Paul, "with circumcision not made by hand, in despoiling of the body of the flesh, but in the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism." (Col. ii. 11.) This is the circumcision of the heart, by virtue of which we deny ourselves, mortify our flesh and conquer our passions. "The circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter," says St. Paul (Rom. ii. 29.). It is the spirit of Christ, the spirit of charity, of patience, of forgiveness, of meekness, and humility. This alone will accomplish the object for which Our Saviour came amongst us in the flesh—"that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and might cleanse to Himself a people acceptable, a pursuer of good works." These are the lessons which the Church teaches us to-day, following the advice of St. Paul to Titus: "These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority." (Titus ii. 15.)

How, then, are we striving to put these lessons into practice? We have been told again and again that we must work and that the work is hard and constant. "Not every one that

saith to Me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of My Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. vii. 21.), says Christ. Again, "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away." (xi. 12.) But we have also been frequently assured that with God's help we can accomplish anything. "I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me," says St. Paul (Philipp. iv. 13.). And, as if anticipating our difficulties in this very matter Holy Scripture tells us: "The Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed: that thou mayst love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, that thou mayst live." (Deut. xxx. 6.) After all the assistance we have received during the holy season of Christmas we surely have the good will as well as the necessary grace and strength to imitate the example of the Divine Infant who submitted for our sakes to the painful shedding of His precious blood.

The "circumcision of the heart" means, in the first place, denying ourselves every unlawful pleasure, so as to be at least free from the guilt of mortal sin. In the next place, it means denying ourselves frequently even lawful

pleasures, so that being masters of all our desires we may become "pursuers of good works," pleasing to God, filled with the love of His Holy Name and of His Holy Law, belonging to Christ, who redeemed us, for, as St. Paul says, "They that are Christ's have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences." (Gal. v. 24.) This may seem difficult and disagreeable, but it is nothing to what Christ suffered for us even in His Circumcision. "If any man will come after Me," says Our Lord Himself, "let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." (Matt, xviii. 24.) "And surely," says the "Imitation," "if there had been anything better and more useful to the salvation of man than suffering, Christ would certainly have shown it by word and example." (Book ii. Chapter 12.)

Let us, then, in the first place, be satisfied with the state and conditions of life which Divine Providence assigns to us. These may seem to be the result of accident, of good or of evil, of birth, parentage, education, talents, health, conditions, opportunities. But whatever we are and wherever we may be, we may rest assured that Almighty God has disposed everything according to His will and as is best for us. Let us place all our care upon Him, and trials, sufferings, and disappointments of

every kind will rest lightly on us when He helps us to bear them. "Be you humbled, therefore, under the mighty hand of God," says St. Peter, "that He may exalt you in the time of visitation: casting all your care upon Him, for He hath care of you." (1 Peter v. 6, 7.) If God grants us worldly success and prosperity, let us humbly thank Him. If He wills otherwise, let us still bless Him, saying with Holy Job, "the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord." (i. 21.) Thus we shall be happy, even in times of greatest trials and suffering, and we shall merit the reward of suffering for those crosses which in any case we should still be obliged to carry.

Such thoughts as these must strike us all the more forcibly to-day, for this is New Year's Day. What a host of memories does not such a day call up in the minds of those who have lived and struggled and suffered for any considerable time in this varied world of joys and sorrows, failures and successes, defeats and triumphs! Yet another year given to us by God to labor for our soul's salvation! Another year gone into the realms of the past, to be accounted for by us to the recording angel! Whether we are old or young we must realize on a day like this that the years that are gone

have gone quickly. "My days have been swifter than a post," says Job. (ix. 25.) Even the longest life looks like a mere shadow to him who looks back upon it. It is "as the dream of them that awake," according to the Psalmist. (lxxii. 20.) Even after lying in the grave for thousands of years the dead who will rise at the sound of the trumpet at the Last Day and hear the angel's voice summoning them to judgment must say, like the prophet Zacharias, "The angel that spoke . . . waked me, as a man that is waked out of his sleep." (Zach. iv. 1.)

And what have we accomplished in the time that is passed? Are we now holier, more united to God, more fit for the kingdom of heaven, than we were during the past? Or are we still only beginning? "I hoped," says Holy Job, "that greater age would speak, and that a multitude of years would teach wisdom. But . . . they that are aged are not the wise men, neither do the ancients understand judgment." (xxxii. 7.) So the Psalmist says: "I thought upon the days of old: and I had in my mind the eternal years" (lxxvi. 6.), for, as he says in another place, his years upon earth were fleeting and fruitless. "All our days are spent; and in thy wrath we have

fainted away. Our years shall be considered as a spider" (lxxxix. 9, 10.); or, as the Revised Version puts it, "We bring our years to an end as a tale that is told." And truly we may say "we are unprofitable servants," for we have not even "done all these things that are commanded." (Luke xvii. 10.) And what hope or promise have we of yet another year in which to make up for the past? Who will restore to us "the years that the locust hath eaten?" for, as the prophet Joel says, "that which the palmerworm hath left, the locust hath eaten." (Joel i. 4.)

Who, but our Divine Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who came into the world for this very purpose and on this day shed His precious blood for us, receiving the very name of "Saviour," "that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and might cleanse to Himself a people acceptable, a pursuer of good works." "And you, O children of Sion, rejoice," He says, "because he hath given you a teacher of justice. . . . And I will restore to you the years that the locust . . . hath eaten." (Joel ii. 23–25.) God may soon call us to account, but by the infinite merits of Christ we shall be able to "circumcise our hearts" and make up for the past. Then, short as the time may

be, "full days shall be found in us," days of sorrow and of joy, perhaps, but filled with that spirit of love and sacrifice which Jesus manifested so clearly in His Circumcision for our example and encouragement.

VIII

THE EPIPHANY

THE METHOD

"Thy light is come."

(Epistle: Isaias lx. 1–6.)

"They offered Him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh."

(Gospel: Matt. ii. 1–12.)

The physical order so apparent in the universe is a sign and a proof of Almighty God's love for method. All the ancient rites and ceremonies of the Jewish law were arranged by His special direction, even to the smallest detail. And so, as "order is heaven's first law," so, chaos is the special characteristic of hell, which is described in Holy Scripture as a land where "no order but everlasting horror dwelleth." (Job x. 22.) Hence, if we are to carry out the resolutions we have made during the holy seasons of Advent and Christmas and work in earnest for our salvation, we must proceed with due order and regularity, after the example of the Holy Family, who "performed all things according to the law of

the Lord" (Luke ii. 39.); and in obedience to the Scripture precept: "Let all things be done decently and according to order." (1 Cor. xiv. 40.) The feast of the Epiphany, which we celebrate to-day, gives us a beautiful idea of the method which we must follow in serving our Divine Master, by presenting for our consideration the story of the Magi who came from the East to pay their respects to the Infant Jesus.

The word Epiphany means "manifestation," and the Church in this festival commemorates that manifestation of the Redeemer to the three kings, or "wise men," by means of the miraculous star, and in and through them to the whole Gentile world, which they represented on that occasion. The event is thus related in the Gospel: "When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Juda, in the days of King Herod, there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying: Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the east and are come to adore Him . . . and the star which they had seen in the East went before them until it came and stood over where the Child was. And seeing the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And entering into the house they found the Child with Mary His Mother, and falling down they

adored Him. And opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh."

These travelers, whose names, according to tradition, were Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar, were petty kings, rich and powerful in their own country, which was somewhere east of Jerusalem. They were skilled students of the astronomy of the time, and also, though pagans, of the ancient prophecies concerning the Messias. One of these prophecies thus referred to the coming of the Redeemer: "A star shall rise out of Jacob and a scepter shall spring up from Israel." (Num. xxiv. 17.) That they expected such a star is clear from their words "we have seen His star in the east." This was probably a luminous body specially created by God for the purpose of guiding them to Bethlehem, for, "it went before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was."

Up to that time Christ had not revealed Himself to the Gentile race. He seemed to be solely and entirely for His own chosen people the Jews. To them alone the miraculous signs that preceded His coming had been made manifest. To Zachary the high priest standing in the Holy Place an angel of the Lord had appeared and announced His coming.

Elizabeth had borne a son in her old age who was to be the Divine Precursor. The Jewish shepherds had heard from the angels the glad tidings of the birth of the Saviour. It was amongst His own people that He chose to be born. Mary, His Mother, and Joseph, His foster-father, were both of the house and family of David.

But though all these signal favors were granted to His own people, it was not for them alone that the Saviour of the world was to be born. He came to save all men, both Jews and Gentiles: "God our Saviour will have all men to be saved," says St. Paul (1 Tim. ii. 3, 4.) And so He deigned to manifest His presence to the Gentiles by guiding the three Wise Men to His earthly abode. For these were of the Gentile race, which had been till then shut out from the light of God's presence by the dark clouds of paganism and infidelity.

Among that less-favored people there had been from distant ages a tradition that a Saviour would be born and that a star should arise in the eastern heavens to manifest His coming. At length that long-wished-for token appeared and sent its bright rays through the mist of ignorance and infidelity in which the Gentile world was then enveloped. "The people that walked in darkness," says Isaias, "have seen a

great light: to them that dwelt in the region of the shadow of death, light is risen." (Isaias ix. 2.) The three Wise Men saw the light and heard in spirit those words of the same Prophet, as read in to-day's Epistle: "Arise, be enlightened, O Jerusalem; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and a mist the people; but the Lord shall rise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall walk in thy light, and kings in the brightness of thy rising." Inspired by the light of God's grace, obedient to His call, full of faith, confidence, and love, they left their own country and set out upon a long and toilsome journey to find the promised Saviour. The star guided them by day and by night until at length they arrived in Jerusalem, where they inquired of King Herod: "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" And they were answered correctly by the priests and scribes: "In Bethlehem of Juda," for so they had read in the Scriptures. Herod was very much disturbed by this, for it seemed to indicate danger to his own position. So he sought to take the life of the Child, and tried to find out first where He was. "Go," he said to the Wise Men, "and diligently inquire after the Child; and when you have found Him,

bring me word again, that I also may come and adore Him." But God had arranged things otherwise. The three kings found the Saviour, but they were warned in sleep by God not to return to Herod, so they "went back another way into their own country." Their neglect to return made the disappointed ruler still more uneasy about the safety of his throne and kingdom, so he issued a decree ordering the massacre of all the male children of two years old and under, feeling sure that the Divine Infant would be amongst the number of those martyred Innocents. Again he was defeated, for in the meantime the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph had fled by the command of God into the country of Egypt.

Meanwhile the three kings had found the Saviour: for, "the star which they had seen in the east went before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was. And seeing the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And entering into the house, they found the child with Mary His Mother, and falling down they adored Him. And opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh."

These gifts, besides being valuable, were not without their deep significance. Frankincense is a sign of the Divinity, for it is offered to

God alone. Myrrh is a sign of human nature, for it is used in embalming and preserving the bodies of the dead. And gold is a symbol of kingly power. Thus, by the nature of their gifts the Wise Men acknowledged in a most beautiful and expressive manner that the Infant before them was their King, their God, and their Saviour.

Shall we follow their example, or that of Herod and the Scribes? The latter were as much afraid of losing their influence as the king was of losing his throne. There are many Catholics, alas, who know full well their way to Christ. They are always promising to come and adore Him. Herod would sacrifice the Redeemer for the sake of his throne and kingdom, but they sacrifice Him for the sake of a miserable pleasure or a little gain. They send their children to a Catholic school, to Mass and the sacraments, but like the Scribes, point out the road to others, yet do not follow it themselves.

Let us, then, imitate the example of the Wise Men. We, too, are Gentiles and were represented by them when they sought Our Lord and offered Him gifts. In our name they prostrated themselves before Him. Now that we are able to do so in person we must renew those manifestations of love and grati-

tude on our own behalf, for, directed by the bright star of faith, we, too, have found the Saviour. The Wise Men offered Him gifts —mere symbols in themselves. We must offer Him the reality. Have we gold to give Him? He seeks not earthly gold from us, but the rich, pure gold of our heart's best love. This is what He ardently desires. This is what He longs for when He says, "My son, give Me thy heart." (Prov. xxiii. 26.) Let us, then, offer Him our heart freed from all sin and purified from all earthly affections in return for the love He has given us, for, as St. John says, "Jesus, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end" (John xiii. 1.)

Have we incense to offer Him? The best that we can give is the pleasing incense of our prayers which, sweeter than any earthly odor, ascend before His throne in heaven and bring down upon us the riches of His grace purchased by His precious blood. "Let my prayer be directed as incense in Thy sight, O Lord," says the Psalmist. (cxl. 2.) Thus will the prophecy of Isaias be still further fulfilled, for, as he said, "the Gentiles shall walk in Thy light, and kings in the brightness of Thy rising," so also he said, "the multitude of the sea shall be converted to Thee, the strength

of the Gentiles shall come to Thee . . . all they from Saba shall come, bringing gold and frankincense: and showing forth praise to the Lord." (Isaias lx. 3–6.)

Have we myrrh to give Him? It is a sign of poor, suffering, human nature. We have it in our power to offer Him not the mere symbol but the reality. If we bear with cheerfulness and resignation all our crosses, trials, and sufferings, and faithfully discharge the duties of our state of life, we shall present Him with a gift that is most acceptable to Him. Myrrh is a plant having a pleasing odor but a bitter taste, and is used in preserving from corruption the bodies of the dead. Suffering and reproach will be a myrrh, bitter indeed to our bodily taste, but bearing for the soul a sweet and pleasant odor of sanctity, preserving it from the corruption of sin unto everlasting life.

Thus we, too, shall acknowledge with the Wise Men that the Infant of Bethlehem is indeed our King, our God, and our Saviour. Like them we, too, having visited for a time the places of sin, shall by God's grace and blessing "go back another way into our own country" of holy living, avoiding the Herod of sin and the roads that lead to it, keeping to the safe paths of prayer and penance, guided by

God's presence to our true home in heaven, where, after "performing all things according to the law of the Lord," we shall find true peace and happiness in the possession of Jesus, our King, our God, and our Saviour.

IX

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

THE MANNER

"Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God, your reasonable service." (EPISTLE: Rom. xii. 1–5.)

"And He came to Nazareth and was subject to them." (GOSPEL: Luke ii. 42–52.)

WE have already seen how necessary it is to be free from sin, and to become "pursuers of good works," in order to please God. We have also seen how we are to proceed in the execution of these works after due order and method by suitably acknowledging Our Lord Jesus Christ as our Ruler, our Maker, and our Redeemer by manifestations of the spirit of love, of prayer, and of penance. To-day we are taught in a most remarkable way the most remarkable lesson ever taught by Jesus Himself—the *manner* in which we are to perform these duties.

We are shown in the Epistle that nothing wonderful or beyond our powers is required of us. We are indeed to become "living sacri-

fices," that is, our whole lives must be entirely devoted to the service of God; but at the same time we are told that only a "reasonable service" is required of us.

Now, what is the living sacrifice we must offer, the reasonable service we must render? There are some who think that in order to lead a life most pleasing to God it is necessary to become monks or nuns and live in a monastery or a convent; or to enter the Church and become a renowned ecclesiastic, a great prelate, or a holy and zealous missionary doing wonderful works for God's honor and leading many souls to God. Others would like to be so rich and powerful that they could correct all abuses, right all wrongs, supply all the needs of Holy Church and relieve the necessities of the sick, the poor, and and the suffering.

These are all generous ideas, no doubt, but it is manifestly impossible for all to realize them in practice, and so we are told in the Epistle "not to be more wise than it behoveth to be wise, but to be wise unto sobriety." That is, we must all take our places and make use of our opportunities according to the measure in which God grants them to us, not aiming at things which are beyond us, but discharging the duties God has assigned us in the

state of life in which He has placed us—"not minding high things but consenting to the humble"—"not being wise in our own conceits," as St. Paul expresses it: for, "as in one body we have many members, but all the members have not the same office," so we can not all be kings, priests, monks, nuns, or missionaries. There must be some to rule and some to obey, some to do the great things that are necessary and some to do the little things which, though apparently trivial in themselves, are equally necessary.

That such is the will of Almighty God is clearly laid down in the Epistle. But it is further shown in a most remarkable manner in the Gospel by the example of our Divine Lord Himself. There we are told that when Jesus was twelve years old He went up to Jerusalem with His holy Mother and St. Joseph to celebrate the feast of the Pasch, and that when they returned He remained in the city unknown to them. As soon as they missed the Divine Child they returned to Jerusalem to seek Him and at length found Him in the temple explaining the Scriptures to the people, disputing with the Doctors of the Law and showing such wonderful knowledge and wisdom that all were astonished.

That He could be so easily lost sight of by

His parents is easily understood when we remember that on such journeys all the men traveled together in one company and the women and children in another: and that Jesus was then of such an age that He might travel with either party. So the Blessed Virgin thought He was with St. Joseph and the latter thought He was with His holy Mother. It is also easy to understand the extraordinary circumstances in which they found Him, for, at certain times when the Law was read to the people they were invited to ask questions, present difficulties, or offer their own explanation of the sacred text. It was a kind of informal conference and any one was free to speak. Thus the Divine Child got an opportunity and made use of it in such a way that "all were astonished at His wisdom and His answers."

When the Blessed Virgin said to Him: "Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Behold, Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing," He made the remarkable answer, not perfectly understood by them at the time: "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" So He proved conclusively and publicly by "His wisdom and His answers" that He was Christ the Son of God: and also publicly declared that He came on earth to

do "His Father's business." And yet, strange to relate, in apparent contradiction to His words and actions at the time, He immediately "went down with them, and came to Nazareth: and was subject to them." There He remained for eighteen years, in complete obscurity, discharging the humble duties of the state of life in which He and His parents lived, and known only as "the carpenter's son." (Matt. xii. 55.)

Had He forgotten or neglected during that long period "His Father's business"? It would be blasphemy to think so. Besides, He said of Himself: "I do nothing of Myself but as the Father hath taught Me . . . for I do always the things that please Him." (John viii. 28, 29.) Hence—O wonderful dispensation of Divine Providence!—Jesus proved that He was God and that He was carrying out perfectly His Father's will in obedience and subjection to His parents, in order to show us that He was performing the most perfect work and leading the most perfect life, "advancing in wisdom and age and grace with God and men," by discharging faithfully in poverty and obscurity for thirty years the humble duties of the poor carpenter's lowly home at Nazareth. What a sublime and wonderful example! What an extraordinary

and important lesson! He who came to redeem the world and to show us the way to heaven by His preaching and example spends thirty years of such a hidden life as an example and only three years in public preaching!

Now who can say that he can not save his soul or become a saint because he can not do great things for God? Who can now complain that he has not such opportunities as others have of devoting his whole life to the service of God? This changes all our ideas and gives rise to fresh hopes: for now we know, thank God, that no matter where we are or what we are, or however humble our position in life may be, we can always do what pleases God best by the faithful discharge of the duties of our state of life. We can all become saints whether we be lay or cleric, warrior or statesman, learned or unlearned, rich or poor, prince or beggar. Nay, it will be easier for us to become holy the lowlier our state in life, for if we are placed in high positions we shall be expected to do great things, and then there will exist the danger of doing them for our own glory, for praise or pride or profit, rather than to "please our Father"; whilst if we have only humble duties to discharge there will be no room for vainglory, but every hope of a great reward for the work we do for God.

Let us, then, after the example of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, be thoroughly contented in the state of life to which it has pleased God to call us. Let us be obedient and respectful to those placed over us, masters, mistresses, parents, superiors of every kind, for such is the will of God. "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers," says St. Paul, "for there is no power but from God: and those that are, are ordained of God. Therefore he that resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God. And they that resist purchase to themselves damnation." (Rom. xiii. 1, 2.)

No doubt many obtain positions of authority by fraud, intrigue, or undue influence, who are not so well qualified to fill them as those over whom they are placed. Yet they are fit enough. In the Holy House at Nazareth there could be no doubt as to who was most qualified to rule, for Jesus Himself was of infinite dignity, wisdom, and grace. Our Blessed Lady was the Mother of God, full of grace and wisdom. Yet poor St. Joseph was in charge of the household. Mary obeyed him and Jesus obeyed both. So it is not for us to judge of the personal dignity or worth of our parents or superiors and pay or withhold obedience and respect accordingly. They may be totally unworthy of either from a human and

personal point of view, but so were the scribes and Pharisees of old, and yet Our Lord advised the people to obey them because they had authority from God. "The scribes and Pharisees have sitten in the chair of Moses," He said, "all things therefore whatsoever they shall say to you, observe and do." (Matt. xxiii. 2, 3.)

Indeed, we need never envy those in authority, for they will be much more strictly judged by Almighty God than those who obey them for His sake, for He is rich in mercy toward the humble, but severe to the great and mighty. "Give ear, you that rule. . . ." He says, "for a most severe judgment shall be for them that bear rule. For to him that is little, mercy is granted: but the mighty shall be mightily tormented. For God will not except any man's person, neither will He stand in awe of any man's greatness: for He made the little and the great, and He hath equally care of all. But a greater punishment is ready for the more mighty." (Wisdom vi. 3–9.)

When Almighty God comes to judge it will be seen that the poor and the humble are mightier than the mighty, whilst the rich and the powerful will be dragged down from their high positions and given the place that is due to them. "He hath put down the mighty from

their seats and hath exalted the humble" (Luke i. 52.), says Holy Scripture. This is the fulfilment of the promise made by God Himself: "Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." (Luke xiv. 11.)

What a source of consolation to the poor and those of low degree, who think they do nothing for God! What an encouragement to all to know that it is not what we do that counts with God but the manner in which we do it: that the perfection of our ordinary actions is of far more importance than the success of extraordinary ones, for the latter may be spoiled by vainglory, whilst the former leave no room for it and if done well must be done to please God.

Let us, then, do all things for our Divine Master and with the intention of pleasing Him. Let us ever be mindful of His presence and say often, "All for Jesus!" This will sanctify and ennoble our humblest duties and they will then please our Father perfectly, for Jesus Himself did no more and He was perfect. If we, like Him, are subject to persons and circumstances for God's sake, we, too, shall "advance in wisdom and age and grace with God and men."

X

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

THE MEANS

"Instant in prayer."
(EPISTLE: Rom. xii. 6–16.)
"They have no wine."
(GOSPEL: John ii. 1–11.)

LAST Sunday we saw that every one has a certain position in life to fill, a certain round of duties to perform, but that our success in pleasing Almighty God depends not so much on what we do as on the manner in which we do it. To-day the Church recapitulates, as it were, all that she has been teaching us since the beginning of Advent, for she is now about to accompany Our Divine Lord in spirit through the various stages of His public life, and learn from His preaching, miracles, and example more about Him, ourselves, and our duties. Thus, in the Epistle she reminds us of our different gifts by referring to those of the first disciples, who helped to spread the true Faith by their gifts

of teaching, ministry, prophecy, miracles, and other remarkable means, and to the different graces we ourselves have received, such as earnestness, charity, joy, patience, hope and peace. But she wishes above all to impress upon us today the great necessity and wonderful efficacy of prayer as a means of salvation, by telling us in the Epistle to be "instant," that is, pressing, importunate, urgent, earnest: and by telling us in the Gospel the story of the first public miracle of our Divine Lord, which He performed in answer to the prayer of His Blessed Mother.

This remarkable incident occurred at a marriage-feast in the village of Cana in Galilee. Our Lord, His holy Mother, and His disciples had been invited, and Jesus was pleased to honor by His presence as well as to sanctify by His grace and elevate to a new dignity the ancient ceremony. "And the wine failing," says the Gospel, "the Mother of Jesus saith to Him: They have no wine. And Jesus saith to her: Woman, what is it to Me and to thee? My hour is not yet come." What thoughtfulness and kindness on the part of our Blessed Lady! Though the young people were probably some relation to her yet she had no responsibility in the matter, for there was a special "chief steward of the feast"

whose business it was to attend to all such matters. But she graciously anticipated the awkwardness and confusion they must have felt under the circumstances and immediately appealed to her Divine Son, for she knew His infinite kindness as well as His infinite power. And though He answered her in the formal and respectful manner usually adopted by the Jews in addressing their parents in the presence of others, He at the same time signified to her that they were not concerned in the difficulty and that the time for beginning His public life had not yet arrived, for it was clear that a miracle would be necessary. However, His holy Mother's confidence in His kindness was sufficient to make her feel that her request was about to be granted, for she immediately turned to the waiters and said: "Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye." And she was not disappointed, for He said to them: "Fill the water-pots with water." These were large stone vessels used in the Jewish ceremonies of purification. "And they filled them up to the brim. And Jesus saith to them: Draw off now, and carry to the chief steward of the feast. And they carried it." And they were all astonished, for the water had been turned into the most excellent wine. Thus was the request of Mary immediately and miracu-

lously granted, and the divine power of her Son publicly manifested and recognized, for the Gospel concludes: "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee: and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him."

If we examine this wonderful occurrence we shall find in it many important lessons. In the first place, we see the natural thoughtfulness and kindness of our Blessed Lady, which prompts her to take an interest in the welfare of others, to anticipate their difficulties and to take prompt measures to alleviate them. If she was so anxious to assist those who were threatened with a mere temporal embarrassment, how much more anxious will she be to help all those poor sinners who are surrounded by dangers and beset with difficulties in the important matter of their eternal salvation; who have not the wine of God's love in their hearts and are not even aware of the poverty of their own resources. She is the "refuge of sinners" and will be their secure and unfailing support if they will only place themselves under her protection by inviting her to be present with them.

The Blessed Virgin teaches us in this incident how to pray. She shows us what confidence we can and must have, when she has

done so much as to demand a miracle and that even out of due season, after an apparent refusal, and for the relief of a mere temporary inconvenience. She does not use many words but expresses her ardent wish as briefly as possible. So when we pray we must have great confidence in the mercy and power of God and in His will to help us. "I say to you, all things whatsoever you ask when you pray, believe that you shall receive and they shall come unto you" (Mark xi. 24.), says Christ Himself. And again: "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, which is moved and carried about by the wind. Therefore let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." (James i. 6, 7.)

But prayer is not merely efficacious; it is absolutely necessary for salvation. For, as Almighty God will grant us anything if we ask it, so He will not give us what we want unless we ask it. "Without Me," says Christ, "you can do nothing" (John xv. 5.); and so He tells us "we ought always to pray and never to faint" (Luke xviii. 1.), and that we should "watch and pray that we enter not into temptation." (Matt. xxvi. 41.) This doctrine He proved by His own example through life, for He frequently engaged in that holy

exercise; indeed, His whole life was a constant prayer, as is clear from every page of the New Testament.

Hence prayer is the only means of salvation. According to St. Thomas, "prayer is necessary not to make our wants known to Almighty God but to make us acknowledge Him to be the author of all our works." And it is the unanimous opinion of the saints, as well as the constant teaching of the Church, that if we pray our salvation is secure, but that if we neglect prayer we are certain to be lost.

Another lesson which stands out clearly to-day is the wonderful influence of the Blessed Virgin with her Divine Son. Here Jesus shows the highest love and respect for His holy Mother and establishes publicly her claims to the greatest dignity. Here she is once for all clearly shown to the world as one who possesses such influence with Jesus her Son as to actually cause Him not only to change the ordinary course of nature by performing a miracle, but even the course of Divine Providence, which He had, as it were, marked out for Himself, for He obeyed her although "His time had not yet come." And could He have acted otherwise, seeing that she was His Mother? Why, even King Solomon said to his mother: "Mother, ask: for I must

not turn away thy face." (3 Kings ii. 20.) And Jesus was surely not to be outdone in maternal love and respect by one of His creatures. "Behold," He said on one occasion, "more than Solomon here. (Luke xi. 31.)

Our prayer must also be humble as well as constant and persevering, as is clearly seen from the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. The former praised himself and recounted his good deeds; the latter humbled himself and confessed his sins. The result was that the prayer of the one was granted whilst that of the other only rendered him more guilty before God; for "this man went down to his house justified rather than the other," as the Gospel relates. (Luke xviii.) Hence we must be resigned to the will of God in all humility and leave everything to His gracious mercy, particularly when we are asking for temporal favors. Want of humility is frequently the cause of the failure of our prayers, for "God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble" (James iv. 6.), says St. James, who also reminds us that we "ask and receive not, because we ask amiss" (iv. 3.), that is, without the necessary dispositions, or because we ask for some favor which would not be of ultimate spiritual benefit to our souls, or per-

haps because we are unworthy. Hence he advises us: "Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hearts, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded." (James iv. 8.)

If we pray to God's holy Mother she will guide and direct us and intercede for us. He has given her to us to be our Mother also, and He has willed that we should receive everything through her intercession. "God has decreed," says St. Bernard, "that we should receive from Him everything through Mary." We have in her a most powerful advocate. She is now Queen of Heaven and her influence with her Divine Son is not less now than it was at the marriage-feast at Cana. Her anxiety to help us is certainly greater than it was when the wine failed, for as the heavens are above earth so is the soul above the body. We should never allow a day to pass without placing ourselves under her protection by saying some little prayer in her honor or by asking her to obtain for us some special favor. Let us wear her scapular, recite her Rosary, and commend ourselves and all our necessities to her care and protection. She will be a secure refuge against all the dangers of this our life and pilgrimage. She will obtain for us the grace of conversion, the grace of the spirit

of prayer and the gift of a true and life-long devotion to her and her Divine Son. This will be for us the surest sign of the hope of obtaining that last and greatest grace—final perseverance. This she promises in those consoling and comforting words: "I love them that love me; and they that in the morning early watch for me, shall find me. . . . Blessed is the man that heareth me and that watcheth daily at the posts of my doors. He that shall find me shall find life and shall have salvation from the Lord." (Prov. viii. 17, 34, 35.)

Yes, our loving Mother will always watch over and protect, as only a devoted mother can, her anxious children. She will foresee their difficulties, anticipate their wants, and obtain for them from her Divine Son all that their souls need, until at last she leads them to the feet of their Saviour, having obtained for them by her intercession through His merits the grace of a holy life and a happy death. Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy! To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve. Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

PART II

THE WORKERS

"And having agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard." **(Matt. xx. 2.)**

XI

FEAST OF THE MOST HOLY NAME OF JESUS

OUR MOTTO

"There is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved."
(EPISTLE: Acts iv. 8–12.)

"His name was called Jesus."
(GOSPEL: Luke ii. 21.)

WE HAVE now seen the serious nature of the great work in which we are all engaged, and the Church, ever anxious to guide the steps of her faithful children, concluded her advice regarding the work itself by bringing before our minds, in the story of the marriage-feast at Cana, the great means by which alone we can render that work successful—constant and persevering prayer. On this same Sunday she begins to tell us of some of the essentials which the worker himself must possess in order to succeed.

When men set out on any important undertaking, particularly when they devote their lives to a certain object, such as the cause of

science or the service of their king and country, they generally place their ideals before themselves in some short, pithy sentence, or even single word, expressive of the guiding principle of their actions, which they call their *motto.* Such a device encourages them in their task, brings them relief and strength in difficulties and encourages them with renewed hope when failure threatens.

Now our work of saving our souls is to be a life-long one which must end either in glorious success or in disastrous failure. And so on this same Sunday the Church places before us a motto which not merely reminds us of our object and encourages our perseverance, but which also by the grace of God has the intrinsic power of enabling us to triumph over every difficulty and of leading us to ultimate success. To-day the Church celebrates the Feast of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, and as she emblazons that sacred emblem upon her banners she desires that it should be engraven also upon the hearts of all her children. "Put me as a seal upon thy heart," says the Canticle of Canticles. (vii. 6.) Our struggle for salvation has all the characteristics of a battle, for it is a continual contest against our spiritual enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil. And our greatest help is that Name of Names

which is a terror to the demons and a tower of strength to us—the Most Holy Name of Jesus.

Whenever Almighty God was pleased to bestow a special name upon any one its meaning always signified the special mission to which the favored one was called. Thus Abraham, which means "father of a multitude," received his name from God, who said to him: "Thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name be called any more Abram: but thou shalt be called Abraham: because I have made thee a father of many nations." (Gen. xvii. 5.) Thus also was Simon called Peter, or "the Rock," by Christ Himself, for he was to be the Rock upon which the Church was to be founded. And so when Almighty God promised to send the Redeemer He did not make known His name, though the prophets often referred to Him under various titles. Thus Isaias says: "His name shall be called Emmanuel" (vii. 14.), which means "God with us." Again, "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of Peace." (ix. 6.) And he finally indicates that His name will be given to Him by God—"Thou shalt be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord shall name." (lvii. 2.)

At length, when the angel Gabriel came to announce to the Blessed Virgin that she was to be the Mother of God he made known the precious title, saying: "Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a Son; and thou shalt call His name Jesus." (Luke i. 31.) Whilst an angel of the Lord announced a similar message to Joseph, adding the reason and the meaning of the title: "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." (Matt. i. 21.) And so, as the Gospel of the Feast relates, "after eight days were accomplished that the Child should be circumcised, His name was called Jesus, which was called by the angel before He was conceived in the womb." Thus was that glorious name to be forever a sign to all men of their salvation and the efficient cause of their sanctification, because He who was to bear it was to be the promised Redeemer. "For which cause," says St. Paul, "God also hath exalted Him and hath given Him a name which is above all names: that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth." (Philipp. ii. 9, 10.) Therefore the whole plan of redemption, the entire mystery of the wonderful love of God for man, which caused Him to send His only-begotten Son to suffer for

our sakes, is comprised in that greatest and best of all names.

The Holy Name of Jesus is, then, for us not only the source of all our consolation, but the cause of all our grace and the mystical power by which every good deed of ours is made fruitful of life everlasting. Thus St. Peter explained its power to the assembled priests, ancients, and scribes, as related in the Epistle, when they set him and St. John in their midst and asked them by what power they had cured the infirm man. He and St. John had gone up to the temple when a certain man who had been lame from his birth asked them for alms. To which St. Peter answered: "Silver and gold I have none; but what I have I give thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and walk." (Acts iii. 6.) And the man was completely cured at the same moment, so that the people all wondered and gathered around the two apostles. Then Peter began to preach to them and explained that it was not by his own power that he had performed the miracle but by the power of the Name of Jesus whom the Jews had crucified. And as many of their hearers were being converted the priests and the officers of the Temple, fearing their influence, came and arrested them. It was then that St. Peter gave

such beautiful testimony to the wonderful power of the Holy Name. "Ye princes of the people and ancients, hear," he said. "If we this day are examined concerning the good deed done to the infirm man, by what means he hath been made whole, be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God hath raised from the dead, even by Him this man standeth here before you whole. . . . Neither is there salvation in any other. For there is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved." Thus St. Peter showed his confidence in the power and efficacy of the Holy Name. Christ had promised His apostles that His name would bring them great success. And they proved it by curing the sick, giving sight to the blind, life to the dead, and obtaining for hardened sinners the grace of true conversion.

The efficacy of that Name still continues and is at the present day the cause of many wonderful miracles of God's grace. As "there is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved," all our grace must come from its power and all our actions must be sanctified by its influence. Its very sound is a terror to hell and puts the

demons to flight. So the Church blesses and sanctifies everything she uses and ends all her prayers by its devout invocation. So should we also make use of it. But we should do so with proper reverence. For it is possible to use it without profit if we do not invoke it with piety and devotion, as St. Paul signifies when he says: "No man can say the Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost." (1 Cor. xii. 3.) What a dreadful crime to abuse this precious title in cursing, swearing, and blasphemy! Yet some Christians so far forget themselves as to call down in anger and vituperation that Holy Name at which every knee should bow! Let us by our love and respect and deep reverence make up as far as we can for such diabolical outrages so that, as St. Paul says, "the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in us and we in Him." (2 Thess. i. 12.)

The Holy Name of Jesus contains for us eternal salvation by obtaining for us the forgiveness of our sins. "For Thy name's sake, O Lord, thou wilt pardon my sin: for it is great," says the Royal Psalmist. (Ps. xxiv. 11.) We should, then, frequently invoke it, saying "My Jesus, mercy." It is a source of strength and consolation in our trials and difficulties, making us rejoice like the apostles that we "are accounted worthy to suffer re-

proach for the name of Jesus." (Acts. v. 41.) Hence we should often say "All for Jesus." It is a tower of strength against the temptations of the devil. "In My Name they shall cast out devils," says Christ Himself. (Mark xvi. 17.) Whenever we are tempted we should always say "Jesus, help me." It is a safeguard against every danger to soul and body. "Whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved," says St. Paul. (Rom. ix. 13.) So we should say, like the sinking Peter and the disciples in the storm, "Jesus, help me, Jesus save me." Thus, as St. Thomas says, "this Name justifies the sinner, delights the just, supports those that are tempted, augments the grace for the just, and beatifies all that call upon it." Yes, for did not Christ Himself say "If you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you"? (John xvi. 23.)

Finally, as this Holy Name has a special efficacy in rendering our actions meritorious in God's sight on account of the infinite merits of Our Saviour, we should make a practice of doing everything under its protection and invocation. Every action of the day will then be sanctified and become very precious in the sight of God. We shall be continually reminded of His presence. "In Him we live,

and move, and are" (Acts xvii. 28.), and so we shall carry out the advice of Holy Scripture and find God in all our ways. "I found an altar," said St. Paul to the men of Athens, "on which was written: *To the unknown God.* . . . God dwelleth not in temples made with hands. . . . They should seek God, if haply they may feel after Him or find Him, although He be not far from every one of us." (Acts xvii. 23, 27.)

"All whatsoever you do in word or in work, do all in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ," says St. Paul. (Col. iii. 17.) Let that Holy Name be ever on our lips and in our hearts. "And these words which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart: And thou shalt tell them to thy children, and thou shalt meditate upon them sitting in thy house, and walking on thy journey, sleeping and rising." (Deut. vi. 6, 7.) Let "All for Jesus" be our motto through life and then when we come to die and pronounce that Holy Name with our last breath it will be a wonderful password which will open for us the gates of heaven and lead us to the eternal enjoyment of all those blessings purchased for us by Jesus Himself, for "He will be merciful to us, if we keep and do all His precepts before the Lord our God, as He hath commanded us." (Deut. vi. 25.)

XII

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

OUR SPIRIT

"Having peace with all men."
(EPISTLE: Rom. xii. 16–21.)
"The children of the kingdom shall be cast out." (GOSPEL: Matt. viii. 1–13.)

BEFORE our Divine Lord came on earth He was referred to by the prophet Isaias as the "Prince of Peace." "For a Child is born to us and a Son is given to us," he said, "and His name shall be called . . . the Prince of Peace." (ix. 6.) And this prophecy was fulfilled to the very letter in the person of Jesus Christ our Saviour. The time of His coming was a time of peace. The message of the angels who announced His coming was that of "peace to men of good will." (Luke ii. 14.) And the feast of Christmas has ever since been recognized as the season of peace and good will.

But this title belonged to Jesus not only from the nature of His divine mission in re-

establishing friendship between God and sinful man, but from the nature of His disposition also, which was that of gentleness, kindness, and forgiveness, qualities which bring peace to the soul who possesses them and to those with whom such a soul comes in contact. Hence, as we took for our motto last Sunday the Holy Name of Jesus, the Church to-day wishes to impress upon our minds the leading features of Our Saviour's character so that we might look to Him as the guiding principle on which to base all our actions and thus not only have His Holy Name as our motto but have Himself as our model and become imbued with His spirit, for, as St. Paul says, we are "predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son." (Rom. viii. 29.)

Accordingly in the Epistle our attention is directed to some of those Christlike qualities which we must possess if we are to be at all like our Divine Master. We are told to have peace with all men "if it be possible." Which means that it is sometimes impossible to agree with everybody and that such a state of disturbance may not always be sinful or un-Christian. Thus the wicked, in order to persuade themselves that everything is right with them, are represented in Holy Scripture as merely imagining themselves to be at peace,

"saying peace, peace, when there was no peace" (Jer. viii. 11.), for "the wicked are like the raging sea, which can not rest, and the waves thereof cast up dirt and mire. There is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord God," according to Isaias. (xvii. 21.) So also those in authority must perform the duties of correction and punishment, unless they are foolish enough to forget them or weak enough to neglect them for the sake of temporary and apparent peace, like that of the wicked. Our Lord made no peace with Satan. He made no peace with the scribes and Pharisees but attacked them frequently and openly in the strongest terms of reproach for their hypocrisy and sin, calling them "brood of vipers," hypocrites," "foolish" and "blind" and "whited sepulchres." (Matt. xxiii.) Nor did He make peace with the traders and the money-changers who desecrated the Temple, but "made, as it were, a scourge of little cords, and drove them all out of the temple, the sheep also and the oxen, and the money of the changers He poured out, and the tables He overthrew." (John ii. 15.) Thus many parents, instead of correcting their children, neglect to do so for the sake of so-called peace: and many masters and mistresses are equally neglectful of those under their care, thus offending God by mak-

ing a truce with Satan, besides injuring the souls of those entrusted to them.

But whilst duly discharging such disagreeable duties we must never forget that the Gospel of Jesus was that of peace and that His whole life was spent in endeavoring "to direct our feet into the way of peace." (Luke i. 79.) Hence the Epistle tells us what will interfere with that spirit of peace which should reign in our hearts. And chief amongst the obstacles it mentions revenge. "Not revenging ourselves, my dearly beloved: but give place unto wrath. For it is written: Revenge to Me; I will repay, saith the Lord." And so we are advised to love our enemies and even to do good to them, thus seeking to "overcome evil by good," for this was the spirit of Christ, who was always kind, gentle, and forgiving even to His greatest enemies. "Who," according to St. Peter, "did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth. Who when He was reviled, did not revile: when He suffered He threatened not, but delivered Himself to him that judged Him unjustly." (1 Peter ii. 22, 23.)

Some think they are filled with zeal for God's honor in their desire to punish evildoers, whereas they are very often animated by a spirit of revenge because their own interests have been injured. So we must be very care-

ful in reprimanding wrong-doing in others that we do so within the proper sphere of our duty, within the proper limits, and in the proper spirit of love, mercy, and forgiveness so characteristic of our Divine Master and Model, Jesus Christ. Thus on one occasion Our Lord sent James and John before Him into a city of Samaria to make preparations for His visit there, as was His usual custom. But the people refused to receive Him, which made the two apostles very angry and indignant, and they said to their Divine Master: "Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them? and turning He rebuked them, saying: You know not of what spirit you are. The Son of man came not to destroy souls but to save." (Luke ix. 52–56.) Thus all harshness, ill-temper, unholy anger and intolerance on the part of parents and superiors is greatly to be lamented and condemned because, though it has the appearance of virtuous indignation, it is in reality born of the devil. Indeed, to feel angry at the sin of another purely because God is offended one must be either a great saint or a great hypocrite. Others again are so impressed with the importance of the spirit of forgiveness that they entirely confuse it with the spirit of pride and self-love. They are

always "forgiving" others because they can not or dare not seek revenge, or they ask God to forgive in the secret hope that He will punish more effectively than they could hope themselves. Such people seldom dream of asking for mercy for themselves because they are seldom humble enough to acknowledge a fault even to themselves. Thus we sometimes find wicked children who are always prepared to "forgive" their parents for punishing them, criminals who will "forgive" their judges for rightly condemning them, and not a few other self-glorified martyrs whose word always is "I forgive you" when it should be "I beg your pardon."

It is, then, easy to mistake the appearance for the reality and to imagine we have the spirit of Christ when we are actually animated with the spirit of the devil. Hence we should study very carefully the life of our Divine Lord and learn from His actions as well as from His words how we are to imitate Him. "Learn of Me," He says, "because I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls." (Matt. xi. 29.) And herein lies the secret. We must change our hearts, for the heart is in this sense the principle of all our actions, the spirit which guides and animates all our thoughts. This is abundantly

clear in every action of Christ, whose mission was to save and not to destroy, to forgive and not to punish. And so He was a model of meekness and humility as well as of kindness and charity. If we are humble we shall not be easily offended: if we are meek we shall not seek revenge for wrongs inflicted: and then only shall we be ready to act with kindness and charity according to the spirit of Christ.

The Church to-day, in order to begin, as it were, to show us a portion of the spirit of our Divine Master, places before us two examples from His miracles, one showing His mercy to a poor leper, the type of a sinner, and the other showing His admiration of the kindness, humility, and lively faith of a Roman officer, who was a pagan. Both teach us clearly the nature of the spirit we must possess if we are to take part in the banquet of the kingdom of heaven as guests duly prepared.

The leper came and adored Christ; that is, acknowledged His divine power, and then humbly made his request, saying: "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." And his prayer was immediately granted, for "Jesus, stretching forth His hand, touched him, saying: I will. Be thou made clean. And forthwith his leprosy was cleansed." Such mercy on the part of our Divine Lord is

nothing compared to the mercy He shows to the poor sinner who humbly acknowledges his sins and asks for forgiveness. Yet it is a sign and a proof of what the mercy and grace of God can do in making out of a great sinner a holy soul imbued with His own spirit.

The Roman centurion, pagan though he was, believed in the wonderful power of Jesus. He came to ask a favor, not for himself or for any of his relations, but for one of his hired servants. He therefore possessed the spirit of kindness, humility, and faith, virtues which he showed in an even stronger light when he said to Our Lord "I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof; but only say the word and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man subject to authority, having under me soldiers; and I say to this, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it." Thus he acknowledged that as God Jesus could command the forces of nature even as he himself could command the soldiers and the servants of his household. And whilst Jesus granted his request He at the same time praised him for the motives which prompted him to make it and for the manner of his utterance, saying to those around Him "Amen, I say to you, I have not found so great faith in

Israel." Our Lord also took occasion to remind His hearers of the danger of depending upon the outward appearances of religion whilst wanting in the proper spirit. "And I say unto you," He said, "that many shall come from the east and from the west and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into the exterior darkness." That the centurion was known to have a kind and charitable disposition is also made clear from the words of the Jewish ancients who came also to plead for him. "He loveth our nation," they said, "and hath built us a synagogue" (Luke vii. 5.), as St. Luke relates.

Let us, then, children of the kingdom of the Holy Church, take care to have on the wedding-garment of the spirit of Christ when we sit at the Divine Banquet (Matt. xxii. 11, 12.) lest we be cast out forever, whilst many of those who do not even yet know Jesus or His love will one time by the grace of God be received as honored guests, clothed with the spirit of their Divine Master, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

XIII

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

OUR TRUST

"Love therefore is the fulfilling of the law."
(EPISTLE: Rom. xiii. 8–10.)

"The winds and the sea obey Him."
(GOSPEL: Matt. viii. 23–27.)

THE GRAND characteristic of our Divine Master is His love for men. The great underlying principle of His holy Gospel and the test of all His true disciples is the same great essential quality of Christian love. Hence the Epistle of to-day tells us that "love is the fulfilling of the law," a principle which was emphasized by Our Lord Himself when He said: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. And the second is like to this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets." (Matt. xxii. 27–38.)

He who loves God, then, for His own sake and his neighbor as himself for God's sake is sure to please the Master in everything. He will not commit adultery, nor kill, nor steal, nor bear false witness, nor covet his neighbor's goods, commandments which are referred to in the Epistle as all included in the great commandment of love, which "worketh no evil." Hence as the love of Jesus for man was the cause of the peace which He purchased for him, so the want of charity works evil in many ways and disturbs the general harmony. Holiness and peace, wickedness and everlasting horror are as closely related as cause and effect.

As the world is full of wickedness, few possess the precious treasure of peace. In our passage across the waters of this life we meet with many rough seas and are threatened by many storms, some from without, but some also from within. So the Church brings before our minds in the Gospel of to-day for our encouragement and consolation the story of the storm which the disciples encountered on the sea of Galilee, so that amidst the angry waters which threaten to engulf the frail bark of our immortal soul, we may be led to have trust and confidence in the mercy and power of Him who rules the waves, and who, when

there is real danger from the storm, will always rise up and say: "Peace, be still."

"When Jesus entered into the boat," says the Gospel, "His disciples followed Him: and behold a great tempest arose in the sea, so that the boat was covered with waves; but He was asleep. And they came to Him and awaked Him, saying: Lord, save us, we perish. And Jesus saith to them: Why are you fearful, O ye of little faith? Then rising up, He commanded the winds and the sea, and there came a great calm. But the men wondered, saying: What manner of man is this, for the winds and the sea obey Him?"

The storms which threaten the soul are both temporal and spiritual, from without as well as from within. Those from without are caused from the circumstances which surround us in our daily lives, by the people with whom we live, by our relations and acquaintances, by our friends as well as by our enemies. Those from within are chiefly spiritual and are due to our natural disposition, inordinate desires, untamed passions, or strong temptations. St. John includes all those dangers in the words: "The concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life." (1 John ii. 16.)

No matter what our position in life may be,

whether we are rich or poor, in subjection or in authority, we have many difficulties to meet and much trouble to encounter. It is hard to convince the poor that the rich are not at peace. The latter envy the former their simple lives, homely habits and honest, healthy pleasures, whilst the former envy the latter their lives of ease, pleasure, and plenty. It is difficult to say which class is the happier from a worldly point of view, but it is easy to see that the poor man who is resigned to his lot in life and devotes himself to his work from a sense of duty to his Creator is far more free from the cares and troubles that always accompany the possession of great riches or high position and responsibility. But be that as it may, the struggle of poverty for the necessaries of life and the struggle of the rich to preserve and increase their store both partake of the nature of a storm. Shame and sorrow, sickness and death visit the homes of rich and poor alike, and so both classes have great need to look to Christ with confidence in order to save themselves from spiritual destruction.

Those who are in positions of great importance or authority are surrounded by dangers of every kind: by hatred, envy, calumny, detraction, opposition, disobedience, disappointment, failure, anxiety, worry, flattery, dissimu-

lation, distrust, disgust, and merciless criticism. It is well for them if they are men of true religion and have the Master with them, otherwise they are sure to be overwhelmed and lost. They may imagine, in their pride and vainglory, that they are honored and respected, because there are none around them with honesty or courage enough to do anything but flatter them. And in most cases this condition of things is their own fault. For favorable opinions are the only ones they will believe, flattery the only food their vanity will permit them to swallow. It seems to be a dispensation of Providence that it should be so, for has not God said "He that exalteth himself shall be humbled"? (Luke xiv. 11.) If they only knew their danger they would turn to God for direction and help. But vanity is always blind as well as helpless. This was the state of the bishop of Laodicea to whom St. John was inspired to write: "I know thy works. . . . Because thou sayest: I am rich and made wealthy, and have need of nothing: and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." (Apoc. iii. 17.)

There are others who are ambitious, or avaricious, or both. They brook no opposition. They look upon every man as their enemy and their hearts are ever in a storm of

suspicion, distrust, fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. Not having God with them on account of their unworthy motives, and not having trusty friends from the nature of their cause, they are left alone in their danger, which in their case is worse than that of those who have already achieved the objects of their ambition.

But even the just suffer tribulation and are surrounded by dangers of every kind. Their best actions meet with failure and their worthiest motives are misconstrued. Their friends prove false, their enemies conquer them, their children dishonor or disgrace them. Sickness, misfortune, and death visit their families. But, having God for their portion, the winds of adversity may blow and the seas of misfortune may rise up in angry waves against them in vain. They suffer with patience, knowing that "whom the Lord loveth He chastiseth" (Heb. xii. 6.): with resignation because, like Holy Job, they say to themselves "the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away: as it hath pleased the Lord so is it done: blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job i. 21.): and with trust and confidence because they know that the goodness and mercy of God will not allow them to be tried beyond their strength. "God is faithful, who will not

suffer you to be tempted beyond that which you are able," says St. Paul. (1 Cor. x. 13.)

Sometimes it is hard indeed for mere flesh and blood to bear with patience the insults and injuries of our enemies, particularly if we are of a sensitive disposition. Very often indeed a sensitive soul sees insult or offense where none is intended, and here a little humility and less thought of self will go a long way to mend matters. But we should be extremely coarse-natured if we were never to feel offended. As St. Paul says, "You suffer if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take from you, if a man be lifted up, if a man strike you on the face." (1 Cor. x. 20.) A stroke is painful and leaves a mark. An injury to the mind or spirit is more painful, because the soul is so superior to the body. Hence even the most broad-minded must sometimes be filled with a storm of indignation. Then it is that we must call upon Christ to help us, especially if we are inclined to a violent or hasty temper. The storm may rise in our hearts but there will be no danger as long as Christ is near us in fervent prayer. He will command the waves to be still and there will come over our souls a great calm and into our hearts a holy peace.

The most dangerous storm which any soul

has to encounter is the storm of temptation. Evil spirits stir up the passions, make wicked suggestions to captivate the senses and set themselves for our spiritual destruction. Hence in this our greatest danger we should always appeal to God for help, saying, like the disciples in the boat, "Lord, save us, we perish," whilst at the same time we should have the fullest trust in His power and the greatest confidence in His will to help us. "God is faithful," says St. Paul, "who will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it." (1 Cor. ix. 13.) In this, as in the case of temporal trials, it is true that "whom the Lord loveth He chastiseth" (Prov. iii. 12.), so that such temptations lead to our greater glory and draw us nearer to God. "You shall greatly rejoice," says St. Peter, "if now you must be for a little time made sorrowful in divers temptations: that the trial of your faith (much more precious than gold which is tried by the fire) may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the appearing of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter i. 7.) Success in life and freedom from temptation often lead a soul from God. "He grew fat and thick and gross: he forsook God who made him, and departed from God his Saviour," says Holy Scripture (Deut. xxxii. 15.), whilst "power is

made perfect in infirmity" according to St. Paul. (2 Cor. xii. 9.)

Let us, therefore, in all our trials have great trust in God. In order to have perfect trust we must have perfect love, for "Perfect charity casteth out fear" says St. John, "because fear hath pain. And he that feareth is not perfected in charity." (1 John iv. 18.) But if we wish to love God we must learn to know Him by often speaking to Him in fervent prayer and meditation. The disciples in the storm feared because they were not perfect in charity, and they were not perfect because they did not know Jesus well enough, for they asked "What manner of man is this?" Let us then study His life and character and listen to His teaching. "This is eternal life," says St. John, "that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." (John xvii. 3.) The more we know Him the better we shall love Him, and the more we love Him the better we shall trust in His goodness and mercy. Then, though He may appear to be asleep, He will rise up at our request and calm the sea of trouble, bringing to our souls "the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, and keeps our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (Philipp. iv. 7.)

XIV

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

OUR INFLUENCE

"Above all things have charity."
(EPISTLE: Coloss. iii. 12–17.)

"His enemy came and oversowed cockle among the wheat."
(GOSPEL: Matt. xiii. 24–30.)

AS WE are to imitate our Divine Master in everything we must imitate Him and co-operate with Him in attaining the great object for which He came upon earth—the salvation and sanctification of the souls of men. To His apostles and their successors He assigned the official duty of continuing the work He had so well begun, saying to them: "Going, therefore, teach ye all nations . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matt. xxviii. 19–20.) But He expects all faithful Christians to share in a certain manner the duties of the priesthood. "Be you also," He says, "a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices." (1 Peter ii. 5.) And as the great means of

spreading the Gospel adopted by Jesus Himself was His preaching and example, so the principal duty of the official ministers of God is to "preach the word in season and out of season." (2 Tim. iv. 2.) In that duty all Christians must also necessarily have a share, for they must, whether they will or not, influence for good or evil all with whom they come in contact, both by the nature of their conversation and the power of their example. Hence to-day the Church calls our attention to the discharge of this responsible duty by quoting in the Epistle those words of St. Paul: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you in all wisdom: teaching and admonishing one another."

First of all she advises us to afford others the opportunity of profiting by what they hear and see by at least refraining from placing any obstacle to their advance in virtue. She tells us to practise "mercy, benignity, humility, modesty, patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another," and exhorts us "above all things to have charity, which is the bond of perfection." Now the greatest possible charity that could be exercised in any one's favor would be the improvement of his spiritual condition, his conversion from error or from sin, his advancement in the practice

of virtue. To such an act of charity God has assigned no less a reward than eternal salvation for one's self. "He must know," says Holy Scripture, "that he who causeth a sinner to be converted from the error of his way, shall save his own soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins." (James v. 20.) And again: "They that instruct many to justice shall shine as stars for all eternity." (Dan. xii. 3.) Hence every good Catholic should not only know as much about his holy religion as, according to the advice of St. Peter, to be "ready always to satisfy every one that asketh you a reason of that hope which is in you" (1 Peter iii. 15.), but should also by his pure and holy life give good example to those around him. "So let your light shine before men," says St. Matthew, "that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Matt. v. 16.)

But if the giving of good example is co-operating with our Lord Jesus Christ in the salvation of souls, what must be thought of those who give scandal, or bad example? Surely they are engaged in the devil's work and are enemies of the Cross of Christ! Indeed, in the parable in to-day's Gospel, Our Lord Himself expressly teaches this dreadful truth. The story says that a man sowed good

seed in his field and that afterward his enemy came and oversowed cockle among the wheat. His servants on making the discovery wanted to root up the noxious weed, but their master was afraid lest they should root up the good wheat together with it, so he told them to wait until the harvest, when both could easily be separated and the cockle gathered up and burnt. Our Divine Lord Himself afterward explained the parable thus: "He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man. And the field is the world. And the good seed are the children of the kingdom. And the cockle are the children of the wicked one. And the enemy that sowed them is the devil. But the harvest is the end of the world. And the reapers are the angels." (Matt. xiii. 37–39.)

What a dreadful, diabolical work, then, is not he engaged in who, by any word or act or mode of conduct leads another into sin, or even renders him less holy! Yet Christ Himself says that the world will always be full of scandals. "It must needs be that scandals come." (Matt. xviii. 7.) Christ came to save sinners: the giver of bad example comes to destroy even the just. Christ sows the good seed: the scandal-giver oversows cockle. No wonder the greatest anger of God is reserved for such sinners. No wonder Christ curses them.

"Woe to that man," He says, "by whom the scandal cometh." And the soul that is lost through scandal will curse forever from the pit of hell the soul of him by whose bad example he was led astray and God Himself will demand satisfaction: "I will require his blood at thy hand," He says through the prophet Ezechiel. (iii. 18.)

It is an awful thing to be guilty of murder. Every one shuns him who sheds innocent blood. But he who kills an innocent soul is infinitely worse. So Holy Scripture says: "Fear ye not them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him that can destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matt. x. 28.) Surely they are children of the devil, for the devil's greatest delight is the murder of innocent souls. "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning," says St. John. (viii. 44.) And if God so generously rewards those who save the souls of others as to grant them the grace of final perseverance, surely He will punish the giver of scandal with everlasting damnation. If those that instruct others unto justice shall shine like stars for all eternity, surely those that scandalize them unto iniquity shall burn in hell forever!

But there are degrees of scandal, just as there are degrees of personal influence. Scandal is called "diabolical" when one sets out deliberately to lead another into sin. It is so called because it is the special business of the very devils themselves, and only a veritable devil in human form could seem to be guilty of it. Then there is "pharisaical" scandal, which is not a sin in the giver but in him who commits a fault on account of it. The Pharisees were scandalized by Our Lord Himself, because through vanity they were jealous of His influence and success, and so professed to be shocked, and perhaps felt shocked, at some of His teachings and miracles! So, whenever we feel pained at what we consider the sinful actions of others, let us always be sure that our pain does not proceed from our own envy, vanity, or pride, for there are some who give themselves airs of holiness and feel self-justified when they see sin in others. As a matter of fact, instead of being honestly grieved at the offense to God's goodness they really indulge themselves in a kind of pleasurable self-glorification which fondly whispers to them that, like the Pharisees of old, they are "not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, as is also this poor publican." (Luke xviii. 11.)

Of all the forms and degrees of scandal, that which Almighty God hates above every other sin, and that on which He pours forth the torrent of His anger most vehemently, is the scandal given to the innocent, and especially to little children. Our Lord on one occasion called a little child to Him, and pointing to him as an example, gave expression to that awful warning and malediction to the scandal-giver: "He that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in Me, it were better for him that a mill-stone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of scandals. For it must needs be that scandals come: but nevertheless woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh." (Matt. xviii. 6, 7.) The little ones of Christ are the first-fruits of His Precious Blood. Those who lead them from God rob Him of His dearest treasures and grievously afflict His Sacred Heart. "Shall a man afflict God? For you afflict Me. And you have said: Wherein do we afflict Thee? In tithes and in first fruits. And you are cursed," says God Himself. (Mal. iii. 8.) And He will pursue and punish such a one "as a bear raging in the wood when her whelps are taken away . . . and the most valiant man, whose heart is as the heart of a

lion, shall melt for fear." (2 Kings xvii. 8–10.)

Hence, parents and superiors should be extremely careful to preserve the innocence and safeguard the virtue of the children entrusted to their care. Very often, alas, they who should naturally be their protectors are their most dangerous enemies, even their very murderers, on account of the bad example which they give them. Children are naturally inclined to imitate the actions of their elders, particularly of those who are placed over them, and so everything sinful that comes under their observation has a powerful influence in leading them astray. They are naturally curious and observant and anything like bad language, coarse or indecent expressions, doubtful or unchaste conversation, sinful actions, immoral pictures or literature are a source of terrible injury to their poor souls. It is a dreadful thing for any sinner to fall into the hands of the living God, but it will be doubly dreadful for him whose duty it is to teach virtue if by his bad example he teaches sin instead and ruins an immortal soul; dreadful beyond imagination if the soul be that of a little child!

A soul once lost is lost forever. What a terrible thing for us if there is any soul now in hell through our bad example! It may be so,

though God forbid. For no one can go through life without exercising his influence on others for good or evil. In this case, as Christ Himself expresses it, "He that is not with Me is against Me: and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth." (Matt. xii. 30.) We do not wish to be enemies of Christ and, like Satan, oversow the cockle of scandal among the good seed of Christ's preaching and teaching and life-long example. But we never know the harm we may have done. So we may say with the Psalmist: "Who can understand sins? From my secret ones cleanse me, O Lord, and from those of others spare Thy servant." (Ps. xviii. 13.)

Let us resolve that henceforth every act and word of ours shall be a source of edification to our neighbors. If we have unfortunately given bad example in the past let our future life be such as to draw many souls to Christ. Thus we shall "above all these things have charity," as St. Paul advises, for the highest form of charity is the sanctification of our neighbor and "covereth a multitude of sins." (2 Peter iv. 8.) Thus, having carried on the work of the Master on earth we shall obtain the promised reward and "shine like stars for all eternity." (Dan. xii. 3.)

XV

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

OUR MESSAGE

"Our gospel hath not been to you in word only, but in power also."

(EPISTLE: 1 Thess. i. 2–10.)

"The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard-seed."

(GOSPEL: Matt. xiii. 31–35.)

SEEING the importance of giving good example and the wonderful influence exerted by every one on those around him, the Church to-day places before us the great value of the Word of God as given to us by those who have received from Christ the official commission to preach and teach it.

In the Epistle she tells us of the wonderful effects it produced amongst the early Christians by quoting the words of St. Paul to the members of the Church in Thessaly. He thanks God for the success of His holy Word amongst them and points out its marvelous

power in the conversion and sanctification of souls. He admires its results in their faith and hope and charity and their tireless zeal for God's honor, so that they became filled with the spirit of the Master and in all their trials and troubles joyfully served Him as models of holiness and perfection through the grace of the Holy Ghost, by which His preaching was blessed and made fruitful.

In the Gospel we are told two of the many parables which Our Saviour on one occasion preached from a boat to the multitude assembled on the seashore. They both refer to the same important subject and show what marvelous effects the Word of God is capable of producing in the souls of men, whilst it seems in itself to be insignificant, being devoid of all those natural qualities of grace, elegance, and the power of pleasing, which are so characteristic of and so essential to successful worldly eloquence.

In the first parable Our Lord compares His Holy Word to a grain of mustard-seed, "which," He says, "is the least indeed of all seeds; but when it is grown up, it is greater than all herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and dwell in the branches thereof." In the second parable He compares the same Word to a "leaven which a

woman took and hid in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened."

These parables were both an illustration and a prophecy. For, from the most insignificant and humble beginnings arose that great and mighty tree of Christianity which even in the time of St. Paul had penetrated all over the known world. A few poor fishermen, ignorant, obscure, and illiterate, changed the whole face of the earth, rooted out vice, planted virtue, overcame prejudices and taught lessons that were altogether opposed to the natural opinions and desires of men. Their followers were persecuted, they themselves without exception sacrificed their lives in defense of their teaching, and their Divine Master Himself was put to the ignominious death of the cross as a malefactor—and yet they conquered. Other religions have at one time and another made some progress in some parts of the earth, but whatever measure of success they achieved was either by the sword, by the influence of great and powerful rulers, or by pandering in their doctrines to the vile pleasures and passions of men. The religion of Jesus was established everywhere by peaceful methods and its doctrines were entirely opposed to the dictates of mere flesh and blood. Instead of revenge it taught forgiveness; instead of

hatred, love; instead of ease and pleasure it taught self-denial, mortification, and penance. It was opposed by the rich, the learned, and the mighty. Insignificant in itself, "the least indeed of all seeds," it was planted by the hand of God, watered by His grace and supported by His power, until it grew and flourished and became a great tree whose branches are now spread over all the earth and serve as a secure shelter for a multitude of souls.

It is clear, then, that the establishment and spread of the Christian religion was the work of God alone. It is clear also, therefore, that we are bound to follow its teachings and practise its maxims. Those teachings and those maxims never change; they are as immutable as God Himself: "For I am the Lord, and I change not," He says through the prophet Malachias. (iii. 6.) And as they were able by God's grace to so change the hearts of men that they no longer gave rein to their passions but subdued and controlled all the desires of the flesh to such a degree as to become saints and models of perfection, leading pure and holy lives in God's service, so are we bound to imitate their example and achieve similar results. For we, too, have received the same Word of God to instruct and guide us in the way of virtue. The Gospel which Jesus Him-

self preached is the same Word which the apostles preached: the same which is preached to-day by their successors, the bishops and priests of the Catholic Church, to whom Our Lord gave the commission to teach all nations and to whom He promised His presence and assistance to the end of time. "Going therefore," He said, "teach ye all nations . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." (Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.) So St. Paul emphatically laid down that the Gospel he preached was the Gospel of Jesus Christ and no other, and that its precepts should be practised by all no matter how they seemed to oppose the dictates of human nature. "Though we, or an angel from heaven," he says, "preach a gospel to you besides that which we have preached to you, let him be anathema. . . . For I give you to understand, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For neither did I receive it of man, nor did I learn it; but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." (Gal. i. 9–12.)

The Word of God is the same to-day as it was in the beginning. It still has nothing to recommend it but its entire simplicity. It is,

as St. Jerome says, "the least of all sciences": and is given to us, according to St. Paul, "not in the persuasive words of human wisdom, but in shewing of the spirit and power; that your faith might not stand on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God." (1 Cor. ii. 4, 5.) Hence when we listen to a sermon or an instruction we should not seek or expect mere pleasure as we should in the case of human eloquence, but receive it "with joy of the Holy Ghost" and "not as the word of men, but [as it is indeed] the word of God." (1 Thess. ii. 13.) Thus we, too, may hope by the grace which it brings to become like those whom St. Paul praises in the Epistle of to-day for their faith and virtue, being "a pattern to all that believed in Macedonia and Achaia."

But what has been the result of God's Word in us? We have been hearing sermons and instructions all our lives; we have been receiving the same gospel which Jesus Christ and the apostles preached. Have we then become better Christians, better Catholics, holier and more pleasing to God, an example to our fellow-men? Alas, it is to be feared that in our case the results are not satisfactory. And how is this? It can not be the fault of the Word we receive, for the Church has ever jealously guarded the precious treasure of the

Faith and the teaching of Christ has been transmitted from the very beginning down to our own day without the slightest shadow of a change, without the addition or subtraction of one jot or tittle, for the Holy Spirit of truth has ever been with her, as Christ promised, guiding and preserving her from error. "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass," says St. Luke, "than one tittle of the law to fall." (xvi. 17.)

Is it the fault of the preachers of God's word? It may be to some extent, but this can not account for it entirely. Their sermons may not be such as to please the taste of modern critics, but still they are zealous for God's honor, they preach Christ crucified and give His Gospel to the people. And we must remember that St. Paul himself failed to influence the proud philosophers to whom he preached at Athens, for "some indeed mocked, but others said: We will hear thee again concerning this matter. So Paul went out from among them" (Acts xvii. 32, 33.); and that even Jesus Christ failed by His preaching and miracles to penetrate the obstinacy and hardheartedness of the unbelieving Jews.

The fault, then, must lie in ourselves. Either we do not attend to God's Word at all, or we listen to it from mere curiosity, or

for the pleasure and entertainment of our minds rather than for the spiritual enlightenment of our souls. Or, having heard it, we do not act upon it by applying its precepts to our daily lives, for we must be "doers of the word and not hearers only," as St. James says (i. 22.), for Christ promises a blessing only to those who act according to its teaching. "Blessed are they," he says, "who hear the word of God and keep it." (Luke xi. 28.)

We have, therefore, a grave responsibility. We have been blessed by the goodness of God with the precious treasure of the Faith, without the tribulation through which the early Christians had to pass. And as "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. x. 17.), so it is by means of that holy Word that our faith must be preserved. Like the woman in the Gospel who "took leaven and hid it in three measures of meal until the whole was leavened," the Word of God must permeate and fill our souls with its wonderful effects until our faith grows and increases and proves to be solid and lasting by the virtues and good works which shall result from it.

But it is not enough, however, to be satisfied with mere personal profit from the message we have received; we must also communicate it to others. "Do not forget to do good

and to impart," says St. Paul. (Heb. xiii. 16.) We must not conceal the light of our faith and good works, but use them for the edification and enlightenment of others. "You are the light of the world," says Christ, "a city seated on a mountain can not be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but upon a candlestick, that it may shine to all that are in the house. So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Matt. v. 14, 15.)

Thus we shall assist in the good work of spreading the Gospel of Christ. Thus we shall share in that great reward promised by God to those who lead others to grace and virtue. And that reward is the forgiveness of our own sins; for "he who causeth a sinner to be converted from the error of his way shall save his soul from death" (James v. 20.); the reward of glory in the kingdom of heaven, for, "they that instruct many to justice shall shine as stars for all eternity" (Dan. xii. 3.); and above all the reward of that personal sanctity which is the effect of God's Word and which will make us worthy "to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, Jesus, who hath delivered us from the wrath to come."

XVI

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY

OUR BURDEN

"They indeed that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible one." (EPISTLE: 1 Cor. ix. 24–x. 5.)

"We have borne the burden of the day and the heats." (GOSPEL: Matt. xx. 1–16.)

EVER anxious to impress upon the minds of her children the importance of the great work of salvation, the Church, like a wise mother, constantly keeps before our eyes the nature of our duties, ever encourages us by holding out the hope of reward for our labors, and ever warns us of failure by pointing out the dangers to which we are most exposed. To-day she begins the season of *Septuagesima,* a period of *seventy* days before Easter, which is to serve as a preparation for that glorious and joyful festival. To-day, then, as a sign of penance, she puts on her garb of purple, omits the joyful sound of her *alleluias,* and draws our attention to the approaching season of Lent, that time of special

grace and mercy, when by prayer, fasting, and penance we renew the strength of our souls, push on with greater fervor toward the goal of everlasting life, and realize more fully that "we have not here a lasting city, but seek one that is to come." (Heb. xiii. 14.)

In the Epistle our attention is drawn to the great difference that exists between the prize that is offered in a worldly competition of athletic prowess, and that which is offered to the successful ones in the contest for life everlasting. In the former case there is only one prize and only one can win it. It is a poor, perishable prize, only a temporary reminder of a little fleeting glory. But in the struggle for salvation there is a prize for all, and every one can win it—an imperishable crown of unfading bliss—"and the end life everlasting." (Rom. vi. 28.)

But one would imagine that it was the other way about when one sees what strenuous efforts are made to secure the passing trifle, and what carelessness is exhibited in endeavoring to obtain the solid, substantial reward of everlasting happiness. What self-denial is practised by every competitor in any test of skill, strength, or endurance by which he may hope to win a little renown! The athlete "refraineth himself from all things." He is care-

ful about the quality and the quantity of his food, of the nature and extent of his daily exercises, so as to obtain the best results from his physical condition. He uses his skill, tact, and ingenuity, labors literally in the sweat of his brow, fasts and denies himself and practically undergoes a course of penance under the directions of his trainer such as he would not dream of submitting to at the hands of a spiritual director who would try to make him fit for the kingdom of heaven. Truly "the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." (Luke xvi. 8.) St. Paul profited by their example, for he says he "chastised his body and brought it into subjection, lest he himself should become a castaway"; that is, he practised self-denial and mortification lest he should lose his soul, for though he "was rapt even to the third heaven," he was painfully aware of the weakness of his flesh. So the Church calls our attention today to the necessity for similar curative and precautionary measures in our case, so that when the holy season of Lent comes on, and we must submit to her commands in the matter, we may be more convinced of the salutary effects of penance and mortification and thus be more disposed to profit by them.

If we discharge faithfully the duties of our

state of life, and bear patiently our crosses and afflictions, we shall indeed lead lives of penance. And as working for God is the best form of prayer, we shall lead lives of prayer also, for "to work is to pray." This is a constant and a daily struggle, as we are so often reminded in Holy Scripture. At one time it is represented as a long road, full of obstacles and dangers, to be traversed by a weary pilgrim; at another as a kind of warfare, a spiritual battle in which we fight against our enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil; again as a voyage through rough seas and stormy winds; and, as in the Epistle of to-day, as a race for a prize. At all times the principal idea brought before us is the difficulty of the task and the constant necessity for strenuous and persevering labor.

Of all the illustrations of our spiritual life and progress which our Divine Master made use of for our enlightenment and instruction, that which is clearest in application and fullest in detail is the parable in to-day's Gospel. The points are briefly these: A master requires laborers for his vineyard and he goes out at different times of the day to secure them—early in the morning, at the sixth, at the ninth, and even at the eleventh hour. At the end of the day he rewards them all alike, paying them

each a full day's wages, every man a penny. This caused surprise and dissatisfaction amongst those who had been hired in the earlier part of the day, because they received no more than those who had worked only one hour, and they complained accordingly. But the only answer they got from the master was that they had received what they had earned, and that it should not concern them if he was pleased to exercise his generosity toward the others.

Here we have an exact and beautiful picture of our dealings with Almighty God in the great affair of our salvation. The vineyard is the world, the master is God, we are the laborers; and the reward agreed upon is the kingdom of heaven. The wages are, therefore, of infinite value, compared to which all the riches and treasures of this world are as nothing, thus making the labor of supreme importance, and proving conclusively that it is the one and only object for which we should work in this world. For, if we save our souls all is saved; but if we fail in that, no matter what success we may have otherwise achieved, all is lost. As Holy Scripture expresses it, "but one thing is necessary" (Luke x. 42.); and, "what doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul? Or what exchange shall a man give for

his soul?" (Matt. xvi. 26.) "We entreat you, therefore," says St. Paul, "that you do your own business" (1 Thess. iv. 11.), that is, the business of your eternal salvation which no one but yourself, assisted by the grace of God, can accomplish, for, though God made us without our consent He will not save us without our consent.

And this is a life-long, dangerous task of hard and unremitting labor, and only "he that persevereth to the end, he shall be saved." (Matt. xxiv. 13.) Dangerous, for Holy Scripture says "With fear and trembling work out your salvation." (Philipp. ii. 12.) A task of hard and unremitting labor, for "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent bear it away" (Matt. xi. 12.). But at the same time it need not interfere with the performance of those daily duties which are allotted to our state of life, for the faithful discharge of these duties is the very first step toward salvation. And, just as in life some have easier tasks than others to perform, so the work of salvation is easier for some than for others, for it may be lighter, or shorter, or both.

Some begin the work "early in the morning" of life. They are born in the bosom of the Catholic Church and devote themselves from

their earliest years to the love and service of God under her divinely appointed guidance. Some at the sixth, some at the ninth, and some not till late in life, in the shades of evening, even at the eleventh hour, receiving the grace of conversion from a life of sin or of error perhaps on their death-bed. But we should never complain, like the laborers in the Gospel, that they "are made equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the heats," for, though we have to work out our salvation with difficulty, surrounded by dangers and temptations of every kind all our lives—"bearing the burden of the day"—and yet with all kinds of worldly disadvantages, sickness, death, disgrace, dishonor, and poverty—bearing also the heats, we must always remember that the Master is good and that we get what is justly ours. For "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able: but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. x. 13.). If we have ever sinned we deserve to be punished not merely in this life but also in the next, so that if we are wise we shall "take what is ours and go our way," saying with the Good Thief, amidst all our trials and troubles, "We indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds." (Luke xxiii. 41.) We

can never tell the designs of Providence in allotting to us the harder task. It may be for our past sins, or for our trial and greater glory, as the Wise Man suggests when he comforts and advises us saying: "Son, when thou comest to the service of God, stand in justice and in fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation. . . . Take all that shall be brought upon thee: and in thy sorrow endure, and in thy humiliation keep patience. For gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation." (Ecclus. ii. 1–5.) Many have easier times and receive greater favors, both spiritual and temporal, but for all that we know they may be like the Israelites who, according to St. Paul were favored by Almighty God with many wonderful blessings: "Our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea. And did all eat the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink; and they drank of the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the desert." (1 Cor. x. 1–5.)

Let us then give ourselves to the work in earnest and labor with zeal and earnestness in God's service, remembering that "the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared

with the glory to come" (Rom. viii. 18.), and that "No man putting his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke ix. 62.) Let us "bear the burden of the day and the heats" without complaining, knowing that it is only what we deserve on account of our sins, and that "if," as Holy Job says, "our sins whereby we have deserved wrath, and the calamity that we suffer, were weighed in a balance, our sins would be much heavier." (Job vi. 2.) Let us look forward with confidence to the great reward that is surely in store for us, not allowing ourselves to be outdone in care, patience, and perseverance by those children of the world who strive so hard and with so much foresight and self-denial for the corruptible goods of this life, knowing that what we struggle for is by no means an uncertainty, but a sure and certain hope of the incorruptible crown of a glorious immortality. "As to the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord the just judge will render to me in that day." (2 Tim. iv. 8.)

XVII

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY

OUR WISDOM

"You gladly suffer the foolish."
(EPISTLE: 2 Cor. xi. 19–xii. 9.)
"And other some fell upon good ground."
(GOSPEL: Luke viii. 4–15.)

IT IS remarkable how often the Church insists again and again upon the great value and necessity of the Word of God in accomplishing the salvation and sanctification of our souls. A few Sundays ago she drew our attention to the universal good effects it was capable of producing in the souls of men and referred to the marvelous spread of the Christian religion as a proof of it. She showed us that according to Our Lord Himself, in His parable of the grain of mustard-seed, what to all outward and mere worldly appearances was but a weak and simple instrument, "the least indeed of all sciences," was by the grace of God rendered a powerful means of sanctifying the world in general. As an instance of which she quoted the example of the Thessa-

lonians who, on the authority of St. Paul who preached to them, "received the word in much tribulation with joy of the Holy Ghost . . . and were made a pattern to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia." (1 Thess. i. 6, 7.)

To-day she draws our attention to the failure of God's holy Word to produce proper fruit in the individual hearts of many Christians. In the Epistle she quotes the words of St. Paul with reference to the foolishness of some of his people who rejected the authoritative message which he announced to them and received the worldly preaching of the false teachers who by their elegant and polished manner of speaking seemed to please their fancy. St. Paul shows them how foolish they were to listen to them by comparing his authority and theirs, and shows by the humble recital of his many sufferings and tribulations in the cause of their spiritual welfare his own complete disinterestedness in seeking to implant in their hearts the precious seed of God's word.

In the Gospel is related the beautiful parable of our Divine Lord in which He compares the preaching of the Word of God to a sower who "went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed some fell by the wayside, and it was trodden down and the fowls of the air devoured it. And other some fell upon a rock; and as soon

as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And other some fell among thorns; and the thorns growing up with it choked it. And other some fell upon good ground, and being sprung up, yielded fruit a hundredfold." And we have the explanation of the parable in Our Lord's own words: "The seed is the word of God. · And they by the wayside are those that hear; then the devil cometh and taketh the word out of their heart, lest believing, they should be saved. Now they upon the rock are they who when they hear, receive the word with joy: and these have no roots: for they believe for a time, and in time of temptation they fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they who have heard, and going their way, are choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and yield no fruit. But that on the good ground are they who, in a good and very good heart, hearing the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit in patience."

As often as we listen to a sermon or an instruction from one of God's duly appointed ministers of the Gospel, so often is the precious seed of the divine Word planted in our souls, and so often do we receive that special grace and light which the official Word alone can diffuse in the hearts of the faithful. But what

has been the result in our case? We saw a few weeks ago that the failure of the Word was not due to the Gospel preached to us, for it is the same Gospel of Christ; nor to the preachers of the Word, for they are the appointed messengers of God to us; but that the fault was in ourselves. And to-day we are taught that we must prepare proper soil for the reception of the holy Seed into our souls.

Some come to hear the Word of God through vain curiosity, or a spirit of criticism, with hearts hardened by passions, with minds darkened by the shadow of infidelity, filled with a vain consciousness of their own superiority. They listen to the sublime truths of the Gospel as if they were mere fables. These are the foolish men of whom Holy Scripture complains. They are ever ready to believe every statement which others make in their favor—they "gladly suffer the foolish," but they can not be convinced of their real danger, for "they themselves are wise." And surely, as St. John says, "if we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater." (1 John v. 9.) In their case indeed "the seed falls by the wayside," and the devil has so much control over them that "he cometh and snatcheth the word out of their heart, lest believing they should be saved." Such men are

wilfully shutting their eyes upon the light of the Gospel, but a day will come when they shall realize to their cost that the Word of God is no mere theory but a real, practical proposition. Truly "the heart of the wise seeketh instruction: and the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness," as the Wise Man says (Prov. xv. 14.).

Others listen with a devout heart and with good intentions, but their devotion seems to be all upon the surface. In their fervor they resolve to be better, but as soon as they leave the church and come in contact with the world again all their fervor vanishes like smoke. They have not the courage to trample on a little human respect; the self-denial to forego the satisfaction they may derive from speaking ill of their neighbor; the generosity to avoid an act of dishonesty which may bring them a little profit; the self-control which will prevent them from yielding to their passions. Thus in their case the precious seed of the Word can not take root, for it falls upon the rock of a heart dried up from want of the moisture of God's grace, poor in the soil of sterling good desire for virtue.

Others again receive the Word with the best intentions and with a sincere desire to profit by it. But they are so surrounded by

the pleasures and cares and riches of this life that their good resolves soon disappear. As a matter of fact they think more of the things of this life than they do of those of eternity. They are even more foolish than the other class, because they seem to realize the nature of their position, and seem to be convinced of the truths of the Gospel; but they allow themselves to be led away from the main object by what they know in their hearts are but useless trifles compared with the goods of eternity. "Now as Jannes and Mambres resisted Moses," says St. Paul, "so these also resist the truth, men corrupted in mind, reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall proceed no farther; for their folly shall be manifest to all men, as theirs also was." (2 Tim. iii. 8, 9.)

"And other some fell upon good ground, and sprung up, and yielded fruit a hundredfold." Some there are who are truly wise. They listen to the Word of God with good dispositions and with a sincere and practical wish to profit by its lessons. They therefore prepare their hearts to receive it with joy and thankfulness and at the same time make up their minds to carry out to the letter all that it asks of them, in spite of friends, enemies, or worldly interests. They are generous with God and God blesses their good resolutions by

giving them the graces necessary to nourish and perfect the precious seed in the good soil of their souls. "Because from thy infancy thou hast known the holy scriptures, which can instruct thee to salvation . . . that the man of God may be perfect, furnished to every good work," says St. Paul. (2 Tim. iii. 15, 17.)

Almighty God will hold us responsible for the proper and fruitful cultivation of His holy Word in our souls. He sows the seed and He expects to reap the most profitable harvest. What shall we answer Him if it shall have proved fruitless in our souls? Well may we dread the fate of that useless and slothful servant who was "cast out into the exterior darkness" for having allowed his talent to remain idle and fruitless in the earth. (Matt. xxv.) Or the fate which Our Lord predicted for the barren fig-tree. "A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it, and found none. And he said to the dresser of the vineyard: Behold, for these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and I find none. Cut it down therefore: why cumbereth it the ground?" (Matt. xiii. 6, 7.)

Let us, then, make the best use for the time to come of the gift of the Word which shall be given to us. When we come to hear a ser-

mon or an instruction let us come with the proper dispositions: not through curiosity, or in a spirit of criticism, or for the pleasure of hearing a favorite preacher, or to seek out from what is said all that applies to others, forgetting ourselves. Some listen to a sermon and check off, as it were, all that does not apply to them, like the Pharisee who said "I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers" (Luke xviii. 11.); but when anything is said that makes them feel uneasy, they blame the preacher. They do not like him: he should not say such things. As if the Word of God in the Catholic pulpit were a mere entertainment or a feast of intellect, concocted to please the diseased palates of the foolish: or as if they should be consulted as to what should be said or not. These are they to whom St. Paul refers in his Epistle to Timothy: "They will not endure sound doctrine; but according to their own desires . . . having itching ears: and will indeed turn away their hearing from the truth, but will be turned unto fables." (2 Tim. iv. 3, 4.) This very often applies to even the devout members of the congregation, so we must all without exception examine ourselves on the matter lest, being blinded by the devil, we deceive ourselves under our cloak of virtue, for according to St. Paul in the same Epistle, such people "resist

the truth: if peradventure God may give them repentance to know the truth. And they may recover themselves from the snares of the devil, by whom they are held captive at his will." (ii. 25, 26.) Hence it is said that the best sermon for us is not the one that pleases us the most, but the one which makes us feel the most uneasy about ourselves. Sermons should not then be analyzed or criticized, but applied as spiritual medicine to our own souls, receiving them not as the word of man but as the wisdom of Almighty God. "Take heed therefore how you hear," says Christ (Luke viii. 18.), "for many prophets and just men have desired to hear the things that you hear and have not heard them. Hear you therefore the parable of the sower." (Matt. xii. 17, 18.)

Thus shall we be truly wise, for "A wise man shall hear and shall be wiser," whereas "Fools despise wisdom and instruction." (Prov. i. 5, 7.) Thus, being anxious "to understand the words of prudence: and to receive the instruction of doctrine, justice, and judgment, and equity" (i. 3.), we shall have prepared good ground for the reception of the seed of the Word of God, and having heard the word in a good and very good heart, we shall by God's grace "bring forth fruit in patience."

XVIII

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY

OUR MOTIVE

"If I have not charity, I am nothing."
(EPISTLE: 1 Cor. xiii. 1–13.)
"Lord, that I may see."
(GOSPEL: Luke xviii. 31–43.)

WHILST the lessons we have already learned and the resolutions we have already formed may be useful and practical in carrying out the great work of our salvation by helping us to serve Almighty God faithfully and well, we must remember that we are as yet but children in the spiritual life, and so can not see the full significance or appreciate at its full worth the real motive of even our best actions. "When I was a child," says St. Paul in to-day's Epistle, "I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child." And "we see now through a glass in a dark manner." That is to say, we have need of God's very special light and grace in order to be able to see and appreciate in a comprehensive and practical manner the great motive which should guide all our thoughts and rule

all our actions, the motive of divine charity.

No more remarkable explanation of that divine virtue can be got than St. Paul's description in the Epistle of what it is and what it is not. He says it is not the gift of eloquent preaching of the word of God. "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." It is not the gift of prophecy or of great mystic insight, or of perfect knowledge, or even of that perfect faith by which mountains could be removed; for he says that even if he possessed all these wonderful gifts he might still not have charity, and so would amount to nothing. "If I have not charity, I am nothing." And more remarkably still he says: "And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." We should at first sight imagine that such noble self-sacrifice as he here describes was the very essence of charity. But no. He says a man may perform all these heroic acts of self-denial for the sake of others and yet not have charity.

What then, is charity? As the Catechism says, it is "that pure and sincere love of God by which we love God above all for His own

sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for God's sake." Charity is twofold. First, there is the love of hope or *desire,* by which we love God as known by faith, as our last end, and for our own advantage in possessing Him. Then there is the love of benevolence, or *charity,* by which we love Him for His own sake, or because He is infinitely good in Himself. The former is inferior and more imperfect, because it has more of the love of ourselves than of God, whom it loves because He will make us happy. But it is good and is a virtue. But the latter is the pure and perfect love of God above everything else for His own sake, and transcends all the other virtues. It is therefore, a love of *preference,* esteeming God beyond all things without exception. "He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me, is not worthy of Me," says Christ. (Matt. x. 37.)

But it is not necessary that charity should be *felt* most; that it should be supreme in *intensity.* For example, we may weep more easily at the death of a friend than for sin committed, though we should regret the loss of the friend much less than the offending of Almighty God; for he that truly loves God for His own sake will hate sin above every other

evil, and will suffer all things rather than offend Him, not because he fears hell, or loses heaven, but because the Supreme Good and His holy will are more than all else to him.

Hence the love of God for His own sake should be the ultimate object of all our thoughts and actions. This Our Lord Himself teaches when He says: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment." (Matt. xxii. 37, 38.) Without charity, then, we can not expect the reward of eternal life. "He that loveth not abideth in death," says St. John. (1 John iii. 14.) But he who truly loves God for His own sake lives in and with God. "He that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him." (1 John iv. 16.)

And he that has true charity avoids sin and all the occasions of sin, without exception. "If any one love Me he will keep My word," says Christ. (John xiv. 23.) Hence this divine virtue justifies us, blots out all our sins, sanctifies our souls, and makes them the objects of God's love. "I love them that love Me" (Prov. viii. 17.), and "Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much." (Luke vii. 47.), says Holy Scripture.

How, then, are we to obtain this inestimable and most necessary gift? In the first place, we must have a strong and ardent desire to obtain it. "Holy desires are the wings with which we fly to God," says St. Alphonsus. If we sincerely wish to love God, He will help us, for "The Lord is good to the soul that seeketh Him," says Holy Scripture (Lam. iii. 25.). And again: "He hath filled the hungry with good things" (Luke i. 53.). And God is most anxious that we should love Him. "I am come to cast fire on the earth," He says, "and what will I but that it be kindled?" (Luke xii. 49.)

But though the desire is good, it is not enough; we must also adopt the means. Those who desire and do not act are irresolute and will never succeed. It is of such the Wise Man speaks when he says "Desires kill the soul." (Prov. xxi. 25.) We must be in earnest and resolved to do without reserve whatever is most pleasing to God. We must then fly from sin and its occasions. "If any one love Me," says Christ, "he will keep My word." (John xiv. 23.) No one can truly love God who deliberately offends Him even in small things. Let us then say with St. Paul: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" (Acts ix. 6.)

In order to hear the voice of God in answer to this question we must devote ourselves to constant and persevering prayer. For in this matter above all others it is an absolute necessity, and herein also meets with the greatest success. Necessary, because charity being the perfection of our supernatural life the will can never reach it without the help of God. Successful, because it is the prayer above all others most pleasing to God.

In order to pray well we must meditate frequently on the inestimable qualities of God, particularly on His goodness and mercy to us, "In my meditation a fire shall flame out," says the Psalmist (xxxviii. 4.)—the fire of the love of God. We should meditate especially on the Sacred Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and try to carry our cross after Him. "The wounds of Jesus," says St. Bonaventure, "wound the hardest hearts and inflame frozen souls." So to-day the Church places before us for our consideration, as a preparation for the holy season of Lent now so near at hand, Our Lord's own account to His apostles of the sufferings He was about to undergo for the love of men. "Behold," He said, "we go up to Jerusalem, and all things shall be accomplished which were written concerning the Son of man. For He shall be delivered to the Gen-

tiles, and shall be mocked, and scourged, and spit upon; and after they have scourged Him they will put him to death; and the third day He shall rise again. And they understood none of these things, and this word was hid from them."

We also may be blind to our own sins and the real meaning and value of Christ's sacred passion and death may be hidden from us. We should then ask our divine Master to enlighten our minds by the grace of the Holy Spirit, praying like the blind man in the Gospel: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me. . . . Lord, that I may see." This will lead us to that most useful and practical exercise of making repeated acts of the virtue of charity. It will engender in the soul a longing for the love of God and will keep His Holy presence with us. "My heart hath said to thee; my face has sought thee: thy face, O Lord, will I seek" (Ps. xxvi. 8.), says the Psalmist. And he that seeks shall surely find, and God will not turn away His face from him.

The result will be perfect peace and happiness of soul, for, as St. Paul says in the Epistle: "Charity is patient, is kind: charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely: is not puffed up, is not ambitious, seeketh not her own, is not provoked to anger, thinketh no

evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth with the truth: beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

The love of God for His own sake, then, shall be the motive of all our actions. Sin will have no place in our souls. All our trials, troubles, labors, and mortifications, borne in union with the sufferings of Our Lord Jesus Christ, will seem sweet and easy to bear. Whatever we do in word or in work, however difficult, however humble, however pleasant, will be done for the love of God, so infinitely good and beautiful in Himself. Thus we shall not only begin our work of labor in the Lord's vineyard with earnestness, continue it in hope, advert to the dangers, look for the promise and the reward, hear the warnings, attain the object, follow the method, adopt the manner, use the means, and act up to the motto of Jesus Himself, but we shall also possess His spirit, His trust, and His influence, receive His message and transmit it to others, bear the burden of the day and the heats, be "wise unto sobriety," and crown all by our motive of charity, for "the greatest of these is charity,"—"whether we eat or drink, or whatever else we do, doing all for the glory of God." (1 Cor. x. 31.)

Let us, then, during the coming holy season

of Lent frequently meditate on the Sacred Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ. It is at the foot of the crucifix that we shall learn the greatness of God's love for us, for, "Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (John xv. 13.) "Do you not," says St. Bernard, "hear the voice of that cross and of those wounds, crying out to make you feel that He truly loves you?" And according to St. Paul, such love on the part of Jesus actually forces us to love Him: "The charity of Christ presseth us." (2 Cor. v. 15.)

These devout exercises, together with the self-denial and mortification of our Lenten fast, will obtain for us light, strength, and consolation, and above all the spirit of prayer. Our hearts will be inflamed with sincere sorrow for our past sins, and the love of God will transform them completely. "And I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and will give you a heart of flesh." (Ezech. xxxvi. 26.) Then "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God." (Rom. viii. 38, 39.)

XIX

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

OUR CHANCE

"Behold, now is the acceptable time."
(EPISTLE: 2 Cor. vi. 1–10.)
"Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert."
(GOSPEL: Matt. iv. 1–11.)

THAT Almighty God does not wish to punish the sinner unless His infinite justice demands it on account of the sinner's obstinacy, is abundantly clear from Holy Scripture. Hence He is constantly warning, exhorting, entreating, and imploring the wicked to change their lives and turn at length to Him in love and repentance. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways and live: and why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezech. xxxiii. 11.)

To some God gives special privileges. To all He speaks at certain times and dispenses special graces and blessings at these periods.

Thus He sent the prophet Jonas to the people of the city of Nineve to warn them that unless they did penance they should be destroyed, "for the wickedness thereof had come up before him" (Jonas i. 2.). So even now He warns us by sending sickness, distress, and misfortunes of all kinds in order to bring us back to the path of virtue. Thus did He deal with King David, who forgot his God in prosperity and returned to Him in adversity. "Thou hast brought forth, O Lord, my soul from hell: thou hast saved me from them that go down into the pit. . . . And in my abundance I said: I shall never be moved" (Ps. xxix. 4, 7.), he said.

Of all the periods of special grace and mercy for the sinner there is none so full of golden opportunity as the holy season of Lent, upon which we have just entered. Formerly "God, who, at sundry times and in divers manners, spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, last of all, in these days hath spoken to us by His Son." (Heb. i. 1.) So to-day Almighty God makes a very special appeal to all poor sinners who have not yet been converted from the error of their ways. And who, even amongst the best of us, is without sin? "Even the just man shall fall seven times" (Prov. xxiv. 16.), says Holy Scripture.

"In many things we all offend," says St. James (iii. 2.). And "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us," says St. John. (1 John i. 8.) Hence we all have need of penance and the message in to-day's Epistle must appeal to all of us: "We exhort you, that you receive not the grace of God in vain. For He saith: In an accepted time have I heard thee; and in the day of salvation have I helped thee. Behold, now is the acceptable time: behold, now is the day of salvation."

In the Gospel is related the story of the temptation of our Divine Master by the devil in the desert. This remarkable incident was permitted by God for our enlightenment and instruction. In all probability the devil was seeking for proof of the divinity of Jesus, which was hidden from him, and sought by foolish and deceptive means to witness some sign of His almighty power. And the story is placed before us to-day for our consideration in order to warn and protect us against the great danger to which we are exposed by the temptations of the devil, who is always seeking to accomplish our spiritual destruction. "Be sober and watch," says St. Peter, "because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may de-

vour" (2 Peter v. 8.), to make clear to us the difference between temptation and sin, for Christ had no sin and yet He was tempted. "One tempted in all things like as we are, without sin," says St. Paul (Heb. iv. 15.): to encourage us in the midst of dangers by reminding us that our Divine Master was made like us in all things, even in this, "that He might become a faithful high priest before God, that He might be a propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that wherein He Himself hath suffered and been tempted, He is able to succor them also that are tempted" (Heb. ii. 17, 18.); to show us how to deal promptly and efficaciously with all evil suggestions of the world, the flesh, and the devil, "the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John ii. 16.); to urge us to withstand the assaults of temptation with courage and fortitude, knowing that "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able: but will make also with temptation issue that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. x. 13.): and that a great reward is in store for us if we successfully resist. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he hath been proved, he shall receive the crown of life," says St. James (i. 11.), and "Because

thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee," says Tobias. (xii. 13.)

The most important safeguard against temptation, the greatest remedy for the sins of the past, and the most efficacious means of making firm resolutions for the future, is the serious consideration of the truths of eternity. "To be forewarned is to be forearmed" is an old proverb, the truth of which is borne out by Holy Scripture itself, which lays down want of thought as the cause of all the sin and misery in the world. "With desolation is all the land made desolate, because there is none that considereth in the heart," says the prophet Jeremias. (xii. 11.) The season of Lent is essentially a time for such serious and solemn thought and self-examination, for it is a time specially set apart for humiliation, fasting, and prayer—the most powerful means for restoring a soul to the grace and love of God, and keeping it in the path of virtue. Fasting, according to the Fathers of the Church, "enlightens the mind and purifies the heart. It banishes all idle imaginations and suppresses all evil desires. It weans the soul from all unlawful pleasures and disposes it to enter into the most intimate union and communication with the Divinity." "Be converted to Me

with all your heart in fasting and in weeping," says the prophet Joel. (ii. 12.) We should, then, in the first place, conscientiously observe the laws of the Church with regard to the prescribed fast and abstinence, not looking on them as painful and unnecessary restrictions but as exercises of self-denial healthful alike to soul and body. "When you fast," says Christ, "be not, as the hypocrites, sad. For they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Amen I say to you, they have received their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face" (Matt. vi. 16, 17.); that is, be cheerful and content.

God was always very pleased with sinners, who thus humbled and denied themselves, and rewarded them with the grace of repentance and conversion, often changing the course of His Divine Providence by turning aside the chastisements He had prepared for them. Thus the people of Nineve acted when the Prophet made known to them the divine anger which was to descend upon them on account of their sins. "They proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least. . . . And God saw their works, that they were turned from their evil way: and God had mercy with regard to the evil which He had

said that He would do to them, and He did it not." (Jonas iii. 5, 10.)

But however useful and salutary these holy exercises may be, we can never accomplish them with any success of ourselves, without the greatest of all means of salvation—constant and persevering prayer. Indeed, they are all but means to that end, as is clear from almost every page of Holy Scripture. "Without Me you can do nothing," says Christ (John xv. 5.), and "Prayer is good with fasting," says Tobias, making fasting relatively of secondary importance. (xii. 8.) Meditation opens the eyes of the soul, makes us see our faults and provide against relapsing into sin: temptation and suffering strengthen the soul, but prayer alone will obtain for us by the grace of God a lasting victory.

The season of Lent, then, is a time for meditation, fasting, and prayer. It is a most appropriate season for devout meditation on the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, because during this period of forty days before Easter the events which surrounded the sufferings and death of the Redeemer are brought vividly before us in the Sacred Liturgy, which follows closely in time and circumstance the various stages of the Master's life.

Meditation on the Sacred Passion is always

accompanied by the special grace of God for the sinner. By its study our minds are enlightened to the eternal truths. When we look upon the crucifix with an intelligent appreciation of what such a consummation means, we must be led to realize more fully by God's grace the great love of the Master for the souls of His servants, the immense value of those souls in His eyes, the terrible evil of sin, and the blindness and hard-heartedness of sinners which made such a sacrifice necessary. Thus the crucifix is, according to St. Augustine, "not only the deathbed, but also the pulpit of Christ." From that pulpit Jesus offers to sinners pardon for their ingratitude, love for their betrayal of Him and the grace of repentance and perseverance. "The wounds of Jesus Christ," says St. Bonaventure, "wound the hardest hearts and inflame frozen souls." Be devout, then, to the crucifix, and Jesus will speak to your heart and teach you to love Him.

Let us listen, therefore, to the advice of the Church to-day. "We exhort you," she says, "that you receive not the grace of God in vain. . . . Behold, now is the acceptable time: behold, now is the day of salvation." This may be the last Lent many of us will spend. So it may be for many of us our last chance. "The

Lord is patient and full of mercy, taking away iniquity and wickedness" (Num. xiv. 18.), says Holy Scripture, but we must not "despise the riches of His goodness and patience and long-suffering" (Rom. ii. 4.), for the hope of the wicked is an abomination to God. "And their hope the abomination," says Job (xi. 20.): while St. Paul warns them that "God is not mocked." (Gal. vi. 7.)

And what a chance we have! Truly may God say to us: "In an accepted time have I heard thee; and in the day of salvation have I helped thee." Last Wednesday when the holy ashes were placed upon our foreheads, we took the first step toward reconciliation with God, and were forcibly reminded of our last end by those solemn words of Holy Church: "Remember, man, thou art but dust, and into dust thou shalt return." These words should make us both think and act. Let us, then, keep the Lenten regulations cheerfully and well. It will not injure our health but rather improve it. "As dying, and behold we live: as chastised and not killed," says the Epistle. In all our penances, trials, and troubles let us look to the cross of Jesus. "They do not notice their own wounds when they behold the wounds of Jesus," says St. Bernard, speaking of the sufferings of the martyrs. Pray ear-

nestly to God, then, "being confident of this very thing, that He who hath begun a good work in you will perfect it unto the day of Christ Jesus" (Philipp. i. 6.)—the Day of His glorious resurrection, which you will by God's grace celebrate in peace and joy on Easter Sunday and afterward forever in the kingdom of heaven.

XX

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

OUR PROGRESS

"That you may abound the more."
(EPISTLE: 1 Thess. iv. 1–7.)
"Hear ye Him."
(GOSPEL: Matt. xvii. 1–9.)

FOR the past two months the Church has been endeavoring to impress upon the minds of her children many practical and important lessons which chiefly concern us as laborers in the vineyard of the Lord. Before she proceeds to continue the communication of the Master's Word in reference to other aspects of our dealings with Almighty God, she wishes to-day to obtain a review as it were of our position, to remove possible misunderstandings, and to encourage us to still further efforts, lest we might imagine that after all we have accomplished up to the present our labors were ended and no other progress was required of us. "Let us," then, as the Preacher says, "all hear together the conclusion of the discourse. Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is all man. And

all things that are done, God will bring into judgment for every error, whether it be good or evil." (Eccles. xii. 13, 14.)

That misunderstandings may occur, and errors be committed, even by the best of us and with the best intentions, is made clear in the Gospel of to-day. There we are told that on one occasion our Divine Master took St. Peter, St. James, and St. John apart to a high mountain and gave them a glimpse of heavenly happiness by appearing before them with all the wonderful qualities of a glorified body visibly manifested before their eyes. "And He was transfigured before them. And His face did shine as the sun: and His garments became white as snow." The body of Jesus being united to His divinity possessed all these gifts by natural concomitance, but they were concealed in order that Christ's mission amongst men might be more successfully accomplished. "For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead corporeally," says St. Paul. (Col. ii. 9.) So that instead of the Transfiguration being a miracle, it was rather the temporary suspension of the perpetual miracle which concealed from the eyes of men during Our Lord's life the glories of the divinity within Him.

"And behold there appeared Moses and

Elias talking with Him. And Peter answering, said to Jesus: Lord, it is good for us to be here: if Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for Thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias." St. Peter in the excess of his happiness forgot himself for the moment. He forgot that his Divine Master had not yet accomplished His mission upon earth, although Christ had even then been speaking with Moses and Elias about the very circumstances of His Passion which He was yet to undergo, for, according to St. Luke, "they spoke of His decease which He should accomplish in Jerusalem." (Luke ix. 31.) And he also forgot that St. James, St. John and himself were also to suffer for the sake of Christ. That they also had yet many things to accomplish. "For he that is entered into his rest," says St. Paul, "the same also hath rested from his works" (Heb. iv. 10.), and as "it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise again from the dead," "and so to enter into His glory" (Luke xxiv.), so it was the duty of His faithful followers to suffer many things after His example, before enjoying forever the glory of which they had but a glimpse on this occasion.

St. Peter, however, was soon enlightened, for, "as he was yet speaking, behold a bright

cloud overshadowed them. And lo, a voice out of the cloud, saying: This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye Him." In other words, the apostles were reminded that they had not yet entered into their rest. That they had yet to carry out the commands of their Divine Master, and, coming down from the mountain, continue to prosecute their labors on earth with the memory of that Blessed Vision as an encouragement to them.

The lesson for us is just the same. Having by God's grace changed our lives and become transformed into the image of God, being "made conformable to the image of His Son" (Rom. viii. 29.), we might be inclined to think that nothing more was required of us. But the Church reminds us in the Epistle that we are called not merely to become children of God by grace and virtue, but that we are "so to walk that we may abound the more," "for this is the will of God, our sanctification"; that is, we are bound to increase every day in the knowledge and love of God, and to become every day more and more holy.

That we are bound always to advance in virtue is one of the most important lessons for a Christian, and is abundantly clear from Holy Scripture. For example, the Psalmist

says: "They shall go from virtue to virtue" (Ps. lxxxviii. 8.); St. Paul, "The inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. iv. 16.): Again, "I pray that your charity may more and more abound in knowledge and in all understanding; that you may approve the better things: that you may be sincere and without offense unto the day of Christ" (Philipp. i. 9, 10.); and St. John, "He that is just, let him be justified still: and he that is holy, let him be sanctified still." (Apoc. xxii. 11.) Hence we are all bound to aim at perfection, which means perfect charity, and can only be obtained perfectly in the state of glory in heaven.

All spiritual writers agree that if we do not advance in virtue we shall certainly go backward. We can never remain in the same state. To God alone belongs the state or quality of permanency. "With whom there is no change or shadow of alteration," says St. James. (i. 17.) But man "fleeth as a shadow and never continueth in the same state," says Job. (xiv. 2.) Even our Divine Master Himself when He was on earth "advanced in wisdom and age and grace with God and men." (Luke ii. 52.)

Hence, not to advance is to go back; not to become holier is to become less holy. Accord-

ing to St. Gregory "those who lead a spiritual life are like a man in the midst of a rapid river. If he stops but for a moment, and strives not continually to bear up against the stream, he will run great risk of being carried down. Now, the course we ought to take is so directly opposite to the current of our nature corrupted by sin, that unless we labor and force ourselves to go on, we shall certainly be hurried back by the impetuous torrent of our passions." So Holy Scripture says: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away." (Matt. xii. 12.)

Our Divine Master spared not Himself, but, "having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end" (John xiii. 1.), says St. John; who also says that "he that saith he abideth in Him, ought himself also to walk, even as He walked." (1 John ii. 6.) When one is satisfied with a certain degree of virtue, then, he is not dealing generously with God, but is doing the Master's work without true zeal, after the manner of a hired servant. "As a servant longeth for the shade, as the hireling looketh for the end of his work" according to holy Job. (vii. 2.) This is indeed negligence, and "Cursed be he that doth the work of the Lord deceitfully,"

says the prophet Jeremias. (xlviii. 10.) It is greatly to be feared that this curse descends frequently upon many apparently good and careful Christians, and that many such lose their immortal souls through their want of generosity in God's service. They may be particular about keeping in the state of grace, attending to their more important spiritual duties and faithfully discharging their grave obligations, but they are not as careful or as anxious as they ought to be about the lesser duties or about their advance in virtue. They may have some secret fault or failing which they do not desire to abandon, persuading themselves that it is not a sin, or that it is at most but an imperfection. But Christ says: "Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. v. 48.); and the Preacher says: "He that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little." (Ecclus. xix. 1.)

Tepidity or lukewarmness causes spiritual blindness, so that the careless soul is very often unaware of its condition and thinks that all is well. This was the state of the bishop of Ephesus, who received a warning from God in these words: "I know thy works and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them that are evil. . . . But I have

somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first charity. Be mindful therefore from whence thou art fallen: and do penance, and do the first works." (Apoc. ii. 2–5.) A similar warning was given to the bishop of Sardis: "I know thy works, that thou hast the name of being alive: and thou art dead. Be watchful and strengthen the things that remain, which are ready to die. For I find not thy works full before my God." (ii. 1, 2.) And to the bishop of Laodicea: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would that thou wert cold or hot. But because thou art lukewarm, I will begin to vomit thee out of My mouth." (iii. 15, 16.)

"And now," as the prophet says, "set your hearts to consider your ways. You have sowed much and brought in little: you have eaten but have not had enough: you have drunk but have not been filled with drink: you have clothed yourselves but have not been warmed: and he that hath earned wages, put them into a bag with holes." (Aggeus i. 6.) It would be a pity to lose the entire fruit of all our labors for the want of a little extra energy in God's service. If we truly wish to love our Divine Master we shall serve Him with great generosity. True love does not set bounds to its service but conquers all difficulties,

"beareth all things, endureth all things." (1 Cor. xiii.)

And though we have "yet a great way to go" (3 Kings xix. 7.), we have Jesus in our company to help us on our journey. For, though a cloud overshaded the brightness of the glory of God on Mount Thabor, it was "a *bright* cloud." The commands of the transfigured Christ which we as well as the apostles were then told to observe are easy to fulfil, and we "can do all things in Him who strengtheneth us." (Philipp. iv. 13.) "Arise," then, "and fear not," but look up toward heaven and "mind the things that are above." The penance and mortification of Lent will help to kill in you the spirit of the world, so that it can be truly said of you: "You are dead; and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ shall appear, who is your life, then you also shall appear with Him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth." (Col. iii. 2–5.) And this vision of Christ thus promised to us will not be a mere temporary glimpse of the divinity such as was vouchsafed to the apostles in the Transfiguration, and at which they "were very much afraid," but the eternal enjoyment in the kingdom of heaven of the blessed company of Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in the beatific vision, "face to face."

PART III

THE HELPS

"And he said to them. . . . I will give you what shall be just." (Matt. xxiv. 4.)

XXI

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

A THREAT

"Because of these things cometh the anger of God." (EPISTLE: Eph. v. 1–9.)

"The last state of that man becomes worse than the first." (GOSPEL: Luke xi. 14–28.)

THERE are unfortunately some Christians who are so taken up with the pleasures of sin that the word of God falls upon their ears and the grace of God upon their hearts without any apparent result. They seem to be spiritually deaf, dumb, blind, and even dead. They have indeed all the characteristics of real death-insensibility and even corruption. For such as these the pleadings of Christ, the proofs of His love, mercy, and power, His exhortations, His rebukes, His entreaties, seem to be alike in vain. So to-day the Church places before us what is at the same time an explanation of such a spiritual condition and a prophecy of the awful consequences to the sinner if he does not try to rise from it.

In doing this the Church makes special reference to a certain kind of sin which she says should not be as much as named among Christians, for she knows that it is the besetting sin of human nature and the cause of the damnation of more unfortunate souls than all other sins put together. "For know ye this and understand that no unclean person hath inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God," says the Epistle, "and because of these things cometh the anger of God upon the children of unbelief."

In the Gospel we are told that on one occasion Our Lord was casting out a devil and delivered a short discourse to the astonished multitude, telling them of the lamentable consequences of relapsing into sin after apparent conversion by the forceful illustration of what happens when the unclean spirit has been driven out of a man and returning finds that the continuous and strenuous opposition to him has ceased. "Then he goeth and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and entering in they dwell there. And the last state of that man becomes worse than the first."

We saw a few weeks ago that temptation and sin are two very different things: that the former, to which even Christ Himself was sub-

jected, instead of being sinful may be an occasion of greater merit and a proof of God's love for us. So that while we pray to be delivered from such trials the best means of defense against them is to take account of their existence and of the means to be used to overcome them. This may be a cause of humiliation for us but it will at the same time be a source of great consolation. This was the spirit in which St. Paul received such trials at the hands of Almighty God. "There was given me," he says, "a sting of my flesh, an angel of Satan to buffet me: for which thing I thrice besought the Lord, that it might depart from me: and He said to me: My grace is sufficient for thee: for power is made perfect in infirmity. Gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may dwell in me." (2 Cor. xii. 7–9.) It would be a great mistake, therefore, for individuals to boast that such shameful and humiliating dangers do not concern them. If by the grace of God they have till now been preserved from them, let them remember St. Paul's words on this very matter: "Though I should have a mind to glory I shall not be foolish" (2 Cor. xii. 6.), and say with the Psalmist: "Not to us, O Lord, not to us; but to Thy name give glory." (Ps. cxiii. 1.)

Let them have regard also to that warning of the same Apostle against the dangers of impurity, to which so many of the Israelites fell victims in the desert: "All these things happened to them in figure: and they are written for our correction, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore he that thinketh himself to stand let him take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. x. 1–11.)

The vice of impurity, although most loathsome to Almighty God and hateful to refined spiritual natures, has a most diabolically seductive influence on the lower animal nature of man. It is therefore the most alluring, the most dangerous, and, alas, the most common of all vices. According to Holy Scripture it makes beasts of men and destroys their intellectual reasoning powers. "Man when he was in honor did not understand; he hath been compared to senseless beasts and made like to them" (Ps. xlviii. 21.), says the Psalmist: and "they give themselves to their lust, as the horse and mule which have not understanding," says Tobias (vi. 17.). We should thank God, therefore, that to-day He opens the eyes of our soul to our danger, makes us realize our condition and warns us of the awful fate which awaits the impure sinner.

It is the opinion of spiritual writers that a

great part of youth is addicted to this abominable vice: and that amongst those who are inclined to it there are many who are not addicted to any other sin, unless such as are the consequence of it. This partly arises from the corruption of our nature, "for the imagination and thought of man's heart are prone to evil from his youth," says Holy Scripture. (Gen. viii. 21.) Sometimes this inclination is increased or diminished by the nature of the physical qualities derived from our parents, from personal temperament, education, habits, companions, surroundings, and other conditions. And certain it is that the devil is most anxious to attack the weakest part of man's nature at that very period when the frailty of his flesh is most likely to overcome the strength of his spirit. It behooves parents and guardians, therefore, to watch over with particular solicitude in this matter those entrusted to their care by properly supervising their education, both secular and religious, their reading, amusements, companions, conversation, and general home conditions, leaving nothing to chance but definitely removing everything that might suggest to the imagination or to the senses anything but what is pure, wholesome, and edifying. "It is a proverb," says Holy Scripture, "A young man according to his

way. Even when he is old he will not depart from it." (Prov. xxii. 6.) Many have the seeds of this dreadful vice sown in their early years by the gross carelessness of parents in exposing them to danger of corruption by placing them in the hands of unscrupulous servants, or allowing them to mix with bad companions of either sex whose conversation and habits are not of the best; and some even corrupt their own children by carelessness in their actions and conversation.

By impurity sinners dishonor God in their bodies, which are members of Christ. "Know you not that your bodies are the members of Christ?" says St. Paul. "Every sin that a man doth, is without the body: but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. Or know you not that your members are temples of the Holy Ghost who is in you, whom you have from God; and that you are not your own? For you are bought with a great price. Glorify and bear God in your body." (1 Cor. vi. 15–20.) And again: "Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? But if any man violate the temple of God, him shall God destroy. For the temple of God is holy, which you are." (1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.)

Without entering into details with regard to the temporal consequences of such sins it is enough to say that health, strength, honor, and peace are destroyed by them and that the seeds of the most loathsome and painful diseases are sown by them and literally transmitted, as Holy Scripture itself warns us, even to the fourth generation. "Who visitest the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation." (Num. xiv. 18.)

But the spiritual consequences are still more to be feared. The crime of impurity has a peculiar faculty for blunting and even destroying the keenness of the spiritual senses. Like the sin of our first parents "it darkens the understanding, weakens the will, and leaves in us a strong inclination to evil." Thus it causes the loss of the fear of God in the soul, so that its victim thinks but lightly of offending his Creator; is not disturbed by the fear of death, judgment, hell, or the loss of heaven: and becomes deaf, blind and spiritually dead, as far as all religious impressions are concerned. This state is followed by a dislike for all spiritual things, by an aversion toward everything which breathes piety or goodness, and by a spirit of pride which causes the sinner to scoff at good advice and to find

fault with the Church and its ministers. Such men are the fools referred to in Holy Scripture; "The heart of a fool is like a broken vessel, and no wisdom at all shall it hold. A man of sense will praise every wise word he shall hear, and will apply it to himself: the luxurious man hath heard it, and it shall displease him, and he will cast it behind his back." (Ecclus. xxi. 17, 18.)

The punishments of God for this sin even in this life are everywhere seen in Holy Scripture. Thus the deluge was sent to destroy the earth because "all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth." (Gen. vi.) The cities of Sodom and Gomorrha were burnt for the same reason (Gen. xviii, xix.); and an immense number of the Israelites were slain in the desert. "Neither let us commit fornication as some of them committed it and there fell in one day three and twenty thousand," says St. Paul. (1 Cor. x. 8.) The death of Amnon and the sons of Heli, the punishment of David and the idolatry of Solomon were all due to the same cause. No wonder, then, we are told in the Epistle that "no unclean person hath inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God . . . for because of these things cometh the anger of God upon the children of unbelief."

Let us, then, take heed of the warning and fear the threat. In the first place, let us never be the cause or the occasion of another's sin. What is to be thought of those women as common now as in the days of Isaias, who use all the artificial means at their disposal in order to be admired by men? This is the prophet's answer: "And the Lord said: Because the daughters of Sion are haughty, and have walked with stretched out necks, and wanton glances of their eyes. . . . The Lord will take away the ornaments of shoes, and little moons, and chains, and necklaces, and bracelets, and bonnets, and bodkins, and ornaments of the legs, and tablets, and sweet balls, and earrings, and rings, and jewels, and changes of apparel, and short cloaks, and fine linen, and crisping pins, and looking-glasses, and lawns, and headbands, and fine veils. And instead of a sweet smell there shall be a stench." (Isaias iii. 16–24.)

Carefully avoid the company of such. Restrain your senses by mortification. Occupy your mind and body with healthful occupation. Guard your eyes and keep your hearts free from all bad desires. Pray with great fervor, especially to the most pure Virgin Mary. Go to confession and holy communion frequently and thus keep out forever the unclean spirit

who, finding you so well armed against him, will leave you in the peace which comes from a pure heart and a clean conscience, for "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God." (Matt. v. 8.)

XXII

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

A PRECEPT

"Cast out the bond-woman and her son."
(EPISTLE: Gal. iv. 22–31.)

"Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?" (GOSPEL: John vi. 1–15.)

THE CHURCH never offers her good advice to us on any matter concerning our soul's salvation without following it up by concrete, detailed and practical directions as to our immediate course of action. From the beginning of the year until now she has called our attention in this way to many useful and necessary means of overcoming the enemies of our spiritual welfare—the world, the flesh, and the devil. To-day she takes the opportunity of laying down definitely for us some of her most important directions, and binds us to observe them under the severest pains and penalties, knowing that we are in need of her strong though kindly hand to lead us away from danger and guide us on the road to virtue. Like a loving mother, too, she insists upon our

taking the medicine which she knows to be of spiritual benefit to us, no matter how disagreeable it may be to our worldly taste.

She places before us, under an allegorical form, our two great duties of confession and holy communion. Her advice to us all along has been that the greatest and most necessary helps to virtue are prayer, penance, and the sacraments. She accordingly insists upon the regular and frequent discharge of these most important duties and makes them the object of her authoritative legislation in those enactments known as the "Precepts of the Church." Here she commands us under pain of sin "to hear Mass on Sundays and Holy-days of obligation," and "to fast and abstain on the days commanded" in order to make us practise those pious exercises of prayer and penance throughout the year and especially during the holy season of Lent. But, as it is possible that the mere outward discharge of these duties may not be accompanied by the proper inward dispositions of the heart, or may arise from a worldly motive, and as she wishes her children to "rend their hearts and not their garments" (Joel ii. 13.), as Almighty God advised the ancient Jews of whom our Divine Master afterward complained: "This people honoreth Me with their lips; but their hearts

are far from Me" (Matt. xv. 8.), she also orders a thorough examination of the inward dispositions and motives, a humble and detailed acknowledgment of sins committed, a firm resolution of sinning no more, and a devout reception of the food of our souls in the sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist. So she commands us "to confess our sins at least once a year" and "to receive worthily the Blessed Eucharist at Easter or thereabouts and within the time appointed: that is, from Ash Wednesday to Trinity Sunday.

As the time for the fulfilment of the paschal precept is now upon us, our attention is called in the Epistle and Gospel to the fulfilment of that necessary obligation, failure to discharge which brings upon us the penalty of "exclusion from the Church of God whilst living, and deprival of Christian burial when dead," as was decreed by the Fourth Lateran Council. In the Epistle we are told that "Abraham had two sons: the one by a bond-woman, and the other by a free-woman. But he who was of the bond-woman, was born according to the flesh: but he of the free-woman, was by promise. Which things are said by an allegory. For these are the two testaments. . . . But as then he that was born according to the flesh persecuted him that was

after the spirit; so also is it now. But what saith the Scripture? Cast out the bond-woman and her son: for the son of the bond-woman shall not be heir with the son of the free-woman." Which means, as St. Paul afterward explains, that we who have been redeemed by the Precious Blood of Christ and serve God as children of love, should not be slaves, but free "with the freedom wherewith Christ hath made us free" and should therefore act according to the spirit of love and not as slaves of the flesh. "For if," he says, "you live according to the flesh, you shall die; but if by the spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live." (Rom. viii. 13.) "Cast out the bond-woman and her son," therefore, and get rid of sin and its consequences by a good and sincere confession.

We have on several occasions been told of the benefits of prayer and penance, of the necessity of "thinking in the heart" and of reckoning up, as it were, our account with Almighty God. "With desolation is all the land made desolate, because there is none that thinketh in the heart." (Jer. xii. 11.) Now none of the spiritual exercises has so much efficacy as those we go through in preparing for a good confession, for the latter includes them all. It means that we seriously consider

the state of our conscience, the eternal truths, the number and the nature of our sins, their cause and cure; that we pray earnestly for light and strength; that we form good resolutions and receive the expert official advice of God's sacred minister and above all his official pardon for our sins, for to him God has said: "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them." (John xx. 23.) Nothing, then, can be more salutary for the sinner than the exercise of preparing for a good confession, and nothing can make him so sure of his pardon from God as the worthy reception of this holy sacrament. How important this duty is may be judged from the fact that the Church actually refuses to recognize as her children any of those who fail to discharge it at least once a year; for she considers that while more frequent approach to the tribunal of penance is necessary, it is impossible for any one to be a true child of God who through his own fault neglects it beyond this period. Let us, then, make frequent use of this most powerful means of sanctification and not remain satisfied with merely fulfilling the letter of the law. At the same time let us prepare for the due discharge of our annual obligation in a spirit of humility and obedience to our holy mother the Church. God will then spe-

cially bless our efforts and help us to discover and repair whatever has been wanting in our past confessions.

In the Gospel of to-day is related the story of the miraculous multiplication of the loaves and fishes by our Divine Lord. An immense number of people had followed Him on account of the many miracles which they had witnessed. And as they had made no provision for their bodily support He began to ask what was to be done in order to provide them with food. "He said to Philip: Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?" There were about five thousand men and all the provisions available were five barley loaves and two fishes. But Jesus made them sit down and then miraculously multiplied the food so that all were satisfied, and the disciples gathered up no less than twelve baskets of fragments.

This also is an allegory, being a figure of that heavenly banquet at which Christ feeds the souls of men in the sacrament of His own most precious body and blood. He was anxious about the physical welfare of those who had followed Him, but He was far more anxious about the spiritual welfare of their souls, for He said to them a few days afterward, when they again sought Him: "You

seek Me not because you have seen miracles, but because you did eat of the loaves and were filled" (John vi. 26.), and went on to explain to them the nature of the heavenly food which He was about to promise to them. "I am the bread of life," He said. "Your fathers did eat manna in the desert and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever; and the bread that I will give is My flesh for the life of the world. . . . Amen, amen, I say to you: Except you eat of the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you." (John vi.) This was plain language indeed and simply states that no man can have true spiritual life in him unless he frequently receives Holy Communion. In other words, no further proof of spiritual death, and consequently even of mortal sin, is needed than the fact that one neglects through his own fault for any considerable period to approach the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist.

Our holy mother the Church is so convinced of this truth that she adds her entreaties to those of her divine Master and implores us to have frequent recourse to this heavenly banquet. Thus she said at the Council of Trent: "The Holy Synod, with paternal affection,

admonishes, encourages, begs, and beseeches, by the bowels of the mercy of our God, that all and every one who bears the name of Christian should frequently receive this supersubstantial bread." In the early days of Christianity such exhortation was not necessary, for the faithful then received holy communion at every opportunity. But when the love of men for their Creator grew cold and they became careless and neglectful, the Church began to revive their spiritual life and by various exhortations tried to make them approach the Holy Table more frequently until, at the Lateran Council in the year 1215, she was forced to threaten them with excommunication if they neglected to receive holy communion at least once a year. This legislation still continues and we are now as then bound to the fulfilment of our paschal duty under the pain of excommunication during life and of deprivation of Christian burial after death.

Let it not be said of us, however, that we go to confession and holy communion once a year because we are forced to do so through fear of these penalties. Let us remember that "we are not the children of the bond-woman but of the free: by the freedom wherewith Christ hath made us free": and that "the son of the bond-woman shall not be heir with the son of

the free-woman." Let us discharge these sacred duties, therefore, with the cheerfulness and love of devoted children. If we are at all anxious to conquer the flesh, to "cast out the bond-woman and her son" and to live as children of the spirit, we shall use the most potent as well as the most necessary means of frequent approach to the sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist. Purified by the former we shall be made worthy to derive from the latter all the gifts and graces which Our Lord Jesus Christ has prepared for those who thus unite themselves to Him in the Blessed Sacrament of His love. Freed from the bondage of sin and its consequences our souls will rise to the enjoyment of the peace and happiness of that kingdom to which Christ by His passion and death has made us heirs, having thus found fulfilment of the promise He made to those who should nourish their souls with His precious body and blood: "He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is meat indeed: and My blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, abideth in Me and I in him." (John vi.)

XXIII

PASSION SUNDAY

A VICTIM

"Neither by the blood of goats, or of calves, but by His own blood."
(EPISTLE: Heb. ix. 11–15.)
"Abraham rejoiced that he might see My day." (GOSPEL: John viii. 46–59.)

BOTH as an explanation of the source of all the wonderful helps to salvation which we have been promised, and which by God's grace we have also on many occasions experienced, and as a preparation for the most important celebrations of the year, especially of the "Great" or "Holy" week which begins on next Sunday, the Church to-day speaks to us of the sacred passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ. In order to concentrate our attention more forcibly on that greatest and most important event which the world has ever seen, she calls this day "Passion Sunday" and bids us to withdraw our minds, for the time being, from all other considerations. So she removes from us even the sight of those exterior aids to virtue

which the figures of Christ, His holy Mother and the saints afford us, by covering up all statues and even crucifixes in her temples. By this expressive ceremony she also intends to remind us of the sad state of those sinners from whom their divine Master has withdrawn His presence even as He hid Himself from those blasphemous Jews in the temple who took up stones in an attempt to punish Him for the very crime of which not He but themselves had been guilty.

In the Epistle reference is made to the ceremonies of purification prescribed in the old law for those who had become guilty of legal uncleanness; that is, who had sinfully disobeyed any article of the law by which they not only offended God, but rendered themselves unfit, and therefore legally forbidden to associate with the general body of the people in their common worship of God. Such enactments were very numerous and the ceremonies of purification usually consisted in the sprinkling of the blood or of the ashes of various animals which had been slain or burnt in sacrifice. Thus Moses said to Aaron: "Take of the herd a calf for sin, and a ram for a holocaust, both without blemish, and offer them before the Lord. . . . And forthwith Aaron, approaching to the altar, immolated

the calf for his sin: and his sons brought him the blood of it: and he dipped his finger therein, and touched the horns of the altar and poured the rest at the foot thereof. . . . And the glory of the Lord appeared to all the multitude." (Lev. ix.) And again: "A man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the cow, and shall pour them forth without the camp in a most clean place, that they may be reserved for the multitude of the children of Israel and for a water of aspersion: because the cow was burnt for sin." (Num. xix. 9.)

But a greater high priest and a more perfect tabernacle were reserved for us: something more than the blood of goats, or of calves or the ashes of a heifer, to free us from the mere defilements of the flesh. We are privileged to possess "a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands; that is, not of this creation," wherein the Priest and the Victim are one and the same, being no less than Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the "High Priest of the good things to come," who by His own most precious blood "by the Holy Ghost offered Himself unspotted to God, to cleanse our conscience from dead works, to serve the living God." "You were not redeemed," says St. Peter, "with corruptible things . . . but with the precious blood of

Christ, as of a lamb unspotted and undefiled." (1 Peter i. 19.)

As it is necessary in order more clearly to understand the mystery of the sacred passion, that we should fully realize the divine personality of the High Priest and the consequent nature and efficacy of the Victim and the Sacrifice, the Church in to-day's Gospel relates the last attempt of our divine Master to induce the unbelieving Jews to recognize Him as the promised Messias. Hitherto He had called on His Heavenly Father as His witness, who had by a voice from heaven and by innumerable miracles given testimony that Jesus was indeed "His beloved Son, in whom He was well pleased." (Matt. xvii. 1–5.) But now He appeals to His own stainless life and blameless character as proofs of His divinity. "At that time, Jesus said to the multitude of the Jews: Which of you shall convince Me of sin?" He thereby inferred that one of such personal sanctity as even they must acknowledge Him to be could not but be all that He claimed to be. "God doth not hear sinners" says Holy Scripture. (John ix. 31.) And as God had already answered the prayers of Christ by the performance of an immense number of extraordinary miracles it should have been a further proof of the truth of His

doctrines. But still they refused to acknowledge His divinity or His mission. They were too worldly-minded, too proud, too hard-hearted, too sinful and ungodly both in their thoughts and actions, as Christ Himself told them in plain words. "He that is of God," He said, "heareth the words of God. Therefore you hear them not because you are not of God." How often do we not meet men who refuse to believe in those same doctrines for the very same reasons. As we saw a few weeks ago, sin darkens the understanding, blunts the spiritual faculties, and deprives a man of true faith, at the same time so weakening his will and corrupting his nature that he remains deaf, dumb, blind, and apparently dead to the most patent truths of religion. Nay more, he acts toward the Holy Church precisely as the Jews in the Gospel acted toward our divine Master. They answered the admonitions of Jesus by dishonoring Him. They said that He was a Samaritan and was possessed by the devil; that is, they accused Him of the very things of which they themselves were guilty—of perverting the true Faith, and of being under the influence of Satan. Then they blasphemed Him and accused Him of blasphemy, and "they took up

stones to cast at Him. But Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple."

Let us not imitate their example, but let us hear the words of God which the Church this day announces to us. As man fell from his original state of innocence, became corrupted by sin and lost all right to heaven, he could not hope to be restored to the grace and favor of Almighty God except by a sacrifice of infinite value as an atonement for his offense of infinite magnitude. And as he could not of himself ever hope to procure such a victim or offer such a sacrifice, God Himself, through His infinite love for the human soul, provided at once both the Priest and the Victim, by sending His only-begotten Son to offer the sacrifice of His own most precious body and blood. "God so loved the world," says St. John, "as to give His only-begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting." (John iii. 16.) And "Jesus," according to the same apostle, "having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end." (xiii. 1.) For Jesus not merely offered the technical sacrifice of Himself to His Eternal Father to redeem us, but showed the excess of His love for us by suffering all the severest

pains and humiliations in order to bring us to Himself and enrich us with all graces and blessings. "I am come that they may have life and may have it more abundantly," He said. (John x. 10.) According to St. Paul, Jesus "emptied Himself" for the love of men and "humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross." (Philipp. ii. 8.) He obtained for us, therefore, all the precious gifts and graces which flow from His Sacred Passion through the appointed channels of His Church, His sacraments, and that self-same Sacrifice which He still offers on our altars in the Holy Mass.

How happy should we be that it is our privilege to share in all those glorious blessings! If Abraham rejoiced that he might see such wonders and was glad when they were revealed to him in Limbo, how glad we ought to be when we see with our own eyes and enjoy in our own person the actual presence of our divine Master! If holy Simeon was satisfied to leave this life as soon as he held in his hands the divine Infant whom he had so longed to see, how contented we should be when Our Saviour not only dwells amongst us but is continually showing us still further proofs of His love! Truly "many prophets and kings have desired to see the things that you see, and have

not seen them: and to hear the things that you hear and have not heard them." (Luke x. 24.)

But if our privileges are so great and so wonderful, our responsibility in making proper use of them is all the greater, for, as St. Luke says, "unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required." (xii. 48.) If others had the like favors granted to them they would have made much better use of them than we have, for "we are unprofitable servants" (Luke xvii. 10.), and "as Jonas was a sign to the Ninivites; so shall the Son of man also be to this generation. . . . The men of Ninive shall rise in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; because they did penance at the preaching of Jonas. And behold more than Jonas here," according to the same evangelist. (xi. 30, 32.) Whilst Our Lord Himself warns us of abusing His graces when, as St. Matthew records, "He began to upbraid the cities wherein were done the most of His miracles, for that they had not done penance. Woe to thee, Corozain! Woe to thee, Bethsaida! For if in Tyre and Sidon had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in you, they had long ago done penance in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and

Sidon in the day of judgment than for you." (Matt. xi. 21, 22.) And certain it is that many now outside the fold of the true Church or separated from God by sin will one day hear the voice of the Redeemer pleading in His Sacred Passion for the souls of men and they will return Him more love and more gratitude than we, His favored children, have ever shown to Him: for, according to St. Matthew, "many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven: but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out." (viii. 11, 12.)

Let us, then, as the favored children of the kingdom of God's love, earnestly devote ourselves during the coming week to the consideration of the sacred passion of Christ. Let us make ourselves familiar with the various scenes of that great tragedy by reading carefully the account given in the Gospel of next Sunday. There we shall see the great love of Jesus for us and we shall thus be led to offer Him our love in return. This is all He requires. "I am come to cast fire on the earth," He says, "and what will I but that it be kindled?" (Luke xii. 49.) There is no spiritual exercise so calculated to inflame our hearts with the love of our divine Master as

the consideration of His sufferings for us. He attaches very special grace to it because the very reason of His passion was to gain our love. "Let us, therefore," as St. John says, "love God, because God hath first loved us" (1 John iv. 19.), by learning more and more the depth of His love for us by devout meditation on His sacred passion.

XXIV

PALM SUNDAY

A KING

"You shall see the glory of the Lord."
(LESSON: Ex. xv. 27–xvi. 7.)
"Behold, thy King cometh to thee meek."
(GOSPEL: Matt. xxi. 1–9.)

TO-DAY the mind of our holy mother the Church is filled with mingled feelings of joy and sorrow, of triumph and humiliation, of fear and confidence. Her sentiments are, as usual, faithfully and beautifully expressed in her sacred liturgy, by means of which she wishes to impress something of her own thoughts upon the minds of all her children. We are now entering upon the celebration of all those wonderful events which occurred during the last week of our divine Master's life on earth: beginning with His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, culminating in the sad and solemn scenes of His sacred passion and death, and bursting forth again with fresh life and with renewed hope and vigor in His glorious resurrection on Easter Sunday morning.

The sentiments of Holy Church follow in the exact order of time the contemplation of those events whose actual occurrence were their first cause. She sees our divine Lord entering Jerusalem in triumph on this great day, accompanied by the joyful multitude who "spread their garments in the way: and others cut boughs from the trees, and strewed them in the way" in order to do Him honor. They all acknowledged Him to be the promised Messias, their King and Saviour, their Lord and Master, for "the multitude that went before and that followed, cried, saying: Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord," as the Gospel of to-day relates. She sees her divine Master acknowledged as a King, and as she bows down in adoration before Him she is filled with sentiments of awe and admiration and holy fear, for she knows that He is the Eternal God. Yet she rejoices that it is her privilege to pay homage to so great a Ruler, for she also knows that He is to be her Redeemer, her Sanctifier, and her best Friend. Whilst the lowly animal that bears Him gives her confidence in approaching a King who, though infinitely great, is also meek and humble: and who deliberately makes use of this lowly means of entry into the Holy City

in order to gain our confidence, for, as the Gospel says, "all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: Behold, thy King cometh to thee meek and sitting upon an ass." We approach our meek and humble Saviour to-day, therefore, with sentiments of love and without fear, for love destroys fear, as St. John says: "Fear is not in charity: but perfect charity casteth out fear, because fear hath pain." (1 John iv. 18.) And as we stand up with palms in our hands at the reading of the Gospel and of the Passion we signify before all men that we recognize Him as our Lord and Master, as our Creator and Redeemer, as our loving Saviour Jesus Christ.

But, alas, those very same people who so loudly proclaimed their loyalty on that occasion were the very ones who, only a few days afterward, denounced Jesus as an impostor, insulted, mocked, abused, and spat upon Him and clamored for His blood in those awful words: "Away with Him, Crucify Him: His blood be upon us and upon our children." No wonder the Church feels mournful at such a sight. No wonder she feels afraid for her children when she sees what God had done for His chosen people and how His kindness was repaid. To this sad and shameful charac-

teristic of human ingratitude toward God she draws our attention in the special Lesson set apart for this Sunday. There she relates how Almighty God, having delivered the Jews miraculously from the power of the cruel king Pharao, led them safely out of Egypt, out of the land of bondage, after a countless succession of the most amazing miracles performed in their favor, until at length "the children of Israel came into Elim, where there were twelve fountains of water, and seventy palm trees: and they encamped by the waters." But they were not long in the desert when they lost confidence in that divine Providence "all the congregation of the children of Israel whose goodness and care had been so abundantly proved, and in their base ingratitude murmured against Moses and Aaron" whom God had appointed to rule and guide them under His divine direction. They longed for those days when, though oppressed in spirit and enslaved in body, they "sat over the flesh-pots and ate bread to the full in the land of Egypt."

Have we ever been guilty of similar ingratitude? Has not our divine Master done more for us than He ever did for the people of Israel, much as He did for them? Did He not lead us out of the land of infidelity and

out of the bondage of sin and bring us into the fruitful and pleasant garden of His love, where we ate the food of angels and drank of the waters of life from the overflowing fountains of His grace and love? But if we have ever committed sin we have forgotten His goodness to us with far baser ingratitude than the Israelites in the desert. We have not only longed for the flesh-pots of Egypt but have actually returned to eat once more the unclean food of sinful pleasures and drink of the bitter and poisoned waters of the world's wickedness. The Jews served God with fear; the thunders of Mount Sinai were ringing in their ears; they were servants; but we are friends. "I will not now call you servants: for the servant knoweth not what his lord doth. But I have called you friends: because all things whatsoever I have heard of My Father, I have made known to you" says Christ Himself. (John xv. 15.) Our ingratitude is therefore all the greater, for, as God complains by the mouth of the Psalmist, "If my enemy had reviled me, I would verily have borne with it. But thou a man of one mind, my guide and my familiar, who didst take sweetmeats together with me: in the house of God we walked with consent." (Ps. liv. 13–15.) And the

prophet Micheas says: "My people are risen up as an enemy." (ii. 8.)

Instead of punishing His unfaithful people for their wickedness and ingratitude, however, God said to Moses: "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you." And He kept His promise by sending them the miraculous food of the manna from heaven and once more tried to encourage them to be constant and faithful by those consoling words: "In the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord." So, too, our kind and loving Master forgives and encourages us. It was not enough that He should bring us out of the bondage of sin and infidelity into the bosom of His holy Church, where the true Faith and His divine providence supply us with every good; but He lays down His life for us in order to provide us with the true heavenly food and drink of His own most precious body and blood. Thus we also have seen "the glory of the Lord." By the saving waters of Baptism we were "made Christians and children of God and heirs to the kingdom of heaven." We then professed our faith in Christ and acknowledged him as our King and our Saviour. We threw off the garments of sin and "renounced Satan with all his works and pomps,"

taking God for our portion forever. But when we sin we act like the Jews of old, and according to St. Paul we run a great risk of losing altogether the spirit of penance and of the love of God by such ingratitude. For the Jews sinned in ignorance but we sin against the light. "It is impossible," he says, "for those who were once illuminated, have tasted also the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, have moreover tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, and are fallen away: to be renewed again to penance, crucifying again to themselves the Son of God, and making Him a mockery. For the earth, that drinketh in the rain which cometh often upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is tilled, receiveth blessing from God. But that which bringeth forth thorns and briers is reprobate, and very near unto a curse, whose end is to be burnt." (Heb. vi. 4–8.) This is a dreadful warning for us and would almost seem to deprive the sinner of the hope of pardon were it not that the holy Apostle immediately adds his encouragement to repent and do better through the help of Our Lord Jesus Christ. "We trust better things of you, and nearer to salvation: though we speak thus. For God is not unjust, that He should forget your work,

and the love which you have shewn in His name . . . who have fled for refuge to hold fast the hope set before us. Which we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and firm, and which entereth in even within the veil: where the forerunner Jesus is entered for us, made a high priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech." (vi. 9–20.)

During this week especially the mercy of our meek and gentle Saviour will be as great as His kingly power and dignity to help us to realize our ingratitude and to receive us back to the love and protection of His Sacred Heart. But in order to realize our share in the sacred passion we must endeavor to comprehend something of the sufferings of Jesus and of the cause of them, by carefully studying the various sad and solemn scenes of this great and holy week. It is strange that so many are so little moved by the account of the sufferings of the meek and innocent Jesus who are so easily moved to sentiments of horror and pity when they read or hear of the punishment of a malefactor. The scourging of our dear Lord and Master, of which their sins were the cause, has little effect on them, but the scourging of a criminal mercifully carried out and well deserved, as well as necessary for our own protection, stirs up within them the

keenest sense of sympathy and sorrow. Let us, then, pray with great devotion for the grace of a true and sincere sympathy for the sufferings of Christ. If we are not moved by them it is because our hearts are hardened by sin and ingratitude. "His heart shall be as hard as a stone, and as firm as a anvil," says Job of the sinner (xli. 15.). But the love of Jesus can change the hardest hearts and move the coldest souls. "I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit within you," says the prophet, "and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and will give you a heart of flesh." (Ezech. xxxvi. 26.) And there is nothing that will teach us the immense love of Jesus for us like the contemplation of His sacred passion. There we see the great King of Glory "despised and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows. Surely He hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our iniquities and was bruised for our sins . . . dumb as a lamb before his shearer." (Isaias. liii.)

Let us ask our dear Mother of Sorrows for the grace of the love of Jesus in His passion. She stood at the foot of the cross, having accompanied Him through all the agonies of the long and painful journey to Calvary, and there we were committed to her care by our

divine Master. She realized the love of her dear Son for us and she will obtain for us the spirit of gratitude and repentance, so that when the great day of the Resurrection comes we shall also realize to the full and with the clear vision of pure souls "shall see the glory of the Lord."

XXV

EASTER SUNDAY

A VICTORY

"Purge out the old leaven."
(EPISTLE: 1 Cor. v. 7, 8.)
"He is risen: He is not here."
(GOSPEL: Mark xvi. 1–7.)

"THIS is the day which the Lord hath made: let us be glad and rejoice therein." (Ps. cxvii. 24.) Thus sings our holy mother the Church on this wonderful Day of Days and Feast of Feasts. And she joyfully invites all her faithful children to join with her in her abundance of happiness at the conquest of sin, death and hell by the glorious resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

At Christmas we rejoiced at the glad tidings of the birth of our Infant Saviour. It was a happy time of peace and good will to men, a time of calm and joyful contentment. But our joy to-day is different, for it has in it an air of triumphant victory. So to-day the Church casts aside the garments of penance and of mourning which she wore during Lent and once more adorns her altars with her rich-

est treasures, clothes her sacred ministers in her most precious vestments and, putting away the memory of the sad scenes of the past few weeks, gives herself up entirely to holy exultation in which, amidst lights and flowers, the music of her organs, the sweet sound of her bells, the odor of her incense and the triumphant tones of her joyful *alleluias,* she encourages all her faithful people to join with fervent thanksgiving, calling on them to "praise the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth forever" (Ps. cxvii. 29.). For this is the greatest Day of the whole year, her most important and her most glorious Festival on which our Divine Master not only triumphed over death and the powers of darkness but also proved conclusively and for all time the truth of His divinity and doctrines.

Jesus, the Man of Sorrows, the despised and rejected of His people, who was led like a lamb to the slaughter, to-day appears as the King of immortal glory, as the Lord and Master of life and death. By His sufferings He purchased heaven for us: but by His resurrection He opened the gates of that region of bliss, the happiness of which He began to enjoy on that day in His glorified humanity: for the glory which Jesus enjoys in heaven as man is due to the sufferings and merits by which

as man He merited it, as He said Himself to the disciples on the road to Emmaus: "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and so to enter into His glory?" (Luke xxiv. 26.)

When Almighty God had decreed to deliver His chosen people from the cruelty of Pharao and the slavery of Egypt He commanded them to sacrifice a spotless lamb in every family and to sprinkle their door-posts with its blood. The same night He sent an angel who put to death the first-born in every family of the Egyptians but passed by the homes of the Israelites, whose doors were marked by the blood of the lamb. Shortly afterward they were again miraculously saved from the Egyptians at the passage of the Red Sea. In memory of these events the festival of the *Passover,* or *Pasch,* was established among the Jews. This was a type of our great *Pasch,* or *Easter,* which is celebrated at the very same period of the year, because it was in the very week of the Jewish Passover that "the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world" (John i. 29.) offered Himself to His Eternal Father and "Christ our Pasch was sacrificed," as St. Paul says in the Epistle.

The most important signification of this glorious festival, and the cause of the trium-

phant joy of Holy Church in its celebration, arises from the fact that on this day our divine Master crowned all His labors and furnished the most incontrovertible and glorious testimony of the truth of all His promises and of His own divine mission. He had already redeemed us by the willing offering of Himself to His Eternal Father in His sacred passion and death; but this was merely the prelude as it were to the grand consummation of all the proofs of His divinity. He knew that He was to suffer and die, for He so willed it, and had foretold long before all the circumstances of His sacred passion with marvelous detail. But He had also foretold His resurrection and had offered its fulfilment as the great, glorious, complete, and final proof of His divinity. He had said to His apostles: "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things shall be accomplished which were written by the prophets concerning the Son of man. For He shall be delivered to the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and scourged, and spit upon. And after they have scourged Him, they will put Him to death; and the third day He shall rise again." (Luke xviii. 31–33.) Such a prophecy was known to His enemies as well as to His friends, and it was taken by the former as a challenge of their guilt in His punishment, and by the

latter as the ground of all their hopes and the vindication of all their trust in Him whom they had so faithfully followed in life and whom they had seen hanging dead upon the cross as a malefactor, to all appearance not only humbled but conquered forever. With what eager expectation, then, must not the apostles and disciples have looked forward to that "third day!" Not that they doubted, for Jesus before His death had confirmed Peter in the Faith and had told Him to confirm His brethren. "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and thou, being once converted, confirm thy brethren." (Luke xxii. 31, 32.) The importance of the fulfilment of the prophecy was, therefore, as important as the truth of the whole Christian religion, for, as St. Paul says, "if Christ be not risen again, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain." (1 Cor. xv. 14.)

That the prophecy and the importance attached to its fulfilment was known to the enemies of Christ is clear from the action they took in regard to it. It was a wonderful dispensation of Divine Providence, by which their unwilling testimony to the divinity of Christ was obtained from the very means which they

took in order to prevent proof of the "error" of the Crucifixion, as they called it. They had already challenged our divine Master, for they "blasphemed Him, wagging their heads, and saying: Vah . . . save Thy own self: if Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. . . . He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He be the king of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him." (Matt. xxvii. 39–42.) Now they took measures to prevent all deception about the promised resurrection, for, as St. Matthew relates: "The chief priests and the Pharisees came together to Pilate, saying: Sir, we have remembered that that seducer said, while He was yet alive: After three days I will rise again. Command therefore the sepulchre to be guarded until the third day: lest perhaps His disciples come and steal Him away, and say to the people: He is risen from the dead: and the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate saith to them: You have a guard: go, guard it as you know. And they departing, made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting guards." (xxvii. 62–66.)

But in spite of all their precautions Jesus triumphed, for when Mary Magdalen and others came to the sepulchre on the morning of the third day "there was a great earthquake.

For an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and coming, rolled back the stone, and sat upon it . . . and for fear of him the guards were struck with terror, and became as dead men. And the angel answering, said to the women: Fear not you; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for He is risen, as He said." (xxviii.) And the guards were bribed to say that while they were asleep the disciples stole the body. If they were asleep, how did they know that the disciples did so? And if they were not asleep why did they allow them to do so? Truly, "Death is swallowed up in victory" and "Thanks be to God, who hath given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. xv. 54–57.)

Whilst we rightly rejoice with Holy Church in the triumphant victory of our divine Master to-day we must remember that He accomplished the mystery of the Resurrection not merely for His own glory, or to manifest and finally prove His divinity, but also for our instruction and example. As St. Paul says in his Epistle to the Romans: "As sin hath reigned to death: so also grace might reign by justice unto life everlasting, through Jesus Christ our Lord . . . that as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so

we also may walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin may be destroyed, to the end that we may serve sin no longer. For he that is dead is justified from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall live also together with Christ. Knowing that Christ rising again from the dead, dieth now no more, death shall no more have dominion over Him. For in that He died to sin, He died once; but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God: so do you also reckon, that you are dead to sin, but alive unto God, in Christ Jesus our Lord." (v. 1–12.)

We must, then, give up sin and its occasions at once and forever, so that we may be truly said to rise from the grave of iniquity to return no more, but to live forever in the grace of God. To accomplish this we must by penance "purge out the old leaven" of our bad habits. These words of the Epistle are an allusion to the law which prohibited the Jews from keeping in their houses during the paschal season any portion of that symbol of corruption. We must remember, too, in all our joy that the way of virtue is by the sure road of

the cross. "If any man will come after Me," says Jesus, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." (Matt. xvi. 24.) We must abandon every occasion of sin, whether of habit, person or circumstance. When Christ rose from the dead He left behind Him even the appearances of death, for when St. Peter came to the sepulchre, "he saw the linen cloths laid by themselves." (Luke xxiv. 12.) So we must shun everything that has even the suggestion of sin. Then when the devil comes to seek us in our old sources of temptation our good angel will be able to answer him for us in those words which the angel used to those who came to seek our Lord at the sepulchre: "Why seek you the living with the dead? He is not here, but is risen." (Luke xxiv. 5, 6.) And when the last great day comes and the voice of the angel will be heard summoning all to the judgment seat of God it will be for us a happy invitation to go and share forever the eternal happiness of Our Lord and Master: for having died to sin we shall rise with Him to our true life where, in the joyful sight of His heavenly glory and in the blessed company of His holy Mother and of His angels and saints, we shall celebrate throughout endless ages the glorious memory of that great and happy Easter Day.

XXVI

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

A GIFT

"This is the victory which overcometh the world, our faith."

(EPISTLE: 1 John v. 4–10.)

"Blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed."

(GOSPEL: John xx. 19–31.)

As the chief cause of our joy last Sunday was the victory of Our Lord Jesus Christ over death and hell, so the principal end that we should aim at is the conquest of that material part of our nature which continually wars against the spirit, and thus merit a share in the glorious privileges which were the fruit of our divine Master's resurrection, which shall be ours also if we imitate Him as we ought, for, as St. Paul says, "if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin may be destroyed." (Rom. vi. 5, 6.)

As faith in Christ is not only the result of His glorious victory, but the first and most necessary qualification for all those who wish to share in His merits and partake of His glory the Church to-day places before us the nature and importance of that heavenly gift. "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world," she says in the Epistle. We know that we are born of God by the saving waters of holy Baptism, by which the merits of Christ are applied to our souls. "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he can not enter into the kingdom of God" (John iii. 5.), says Christ Himself: and "all we, who are baptized in Christ Jesus, are baptized in His death," says St. Paul. But as Christ also said "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be condemned" (Mark vi. 16.), faith is the very first essential. And so, as the Epistle continues, "this is the victory which overcometh the world, our faith," by which we believe that Jesus is the Son of God and saved us not merely by the waters of Baptism, but by His own blood—"not by water only, but by water and blood."

In the Gospel we are told of the grand characteristic of perfect faith—unbounded confidence in the authority of God Himself—

by the story of the appearance of our divine Lord after His resurrection "when the doors were shut where the disciples were gathered together for fear of the Jews," and of the doubt and subsequent confession of St. Thomas, to whom Our Lord gave blame for his doubt but praise for his beautiful acknowledgment of His divinity, saying: "Because thou hast seen Me, Thomas, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed."

Faith is a supernatural virtue infused into our souls by God, by which we believe all the truths He has revealed to us. Hence it can not be acquired by human reason alone and unaided by the light and grace of God. It is a gift of God, as St. Paul says: "By grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, for it is the gift of God." (Eph. ii. 8.) By faith, therefore, we honor God in submitting our intellect to Him and believing on His authority even those things that are not clear to human reason, for "faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not," as St. Paul explains it. (Heb. xi. 1.) If we had evidence for what we believed, apart from God's authority, how could we honor God or deserve credit for believing? No. "Blessed are they

who have not seen, and have believed," said Christ to St. Thomas.

Though the assent of faith is in a sense obscure, it is still most reasonable, for when God reveals His truths to us He provides us with abundant motives for believing and gives us His own authority for them. As Catholics we believe all the doctrines which the Church proposes to our belief as having been revealed by God. Many of these doctrines are mysteries which reason can not comprehend: others can not be fully understood by the ignorant or the uneducated: others may be entirely unknown to us, yet we believe them implicitly. How, then, is our faith reasonable? Is it less reasonable to believe what God tells us than to believe what man tells us, for in nearly everything we are guided by the authority of others. Who would deny the existence of such a place as Rome, for instance, because he had never seen it? Who would deny the existence of the many mysteries of nature because he does not understand them? Who, then, can dare to deny the truth of what God has revealed because he can not prove it or does not understand it? Truly, as the Epistle says, "If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater."

But how can we be sure that God has ac-

tually revealed these truths to us? To His holy Church He has committed the entire body of revealed truth, in support of which He cured the sick, the blind and the lame and raised the dead to life. He rose from the dead Himself glorious and immortal and so proved the divine origin of all the authority He claimed in preaching and teaching His doctrines. And when the time came for His departure out of this world He formally transferred all His authority to the Church, promising to be always with her to guide her in her mission. "All power is given to Me in heaven and in earth," He said, "Going, therefore, teach ye all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." (Matt. xxviii. 18–20.) And again He said: "He that heareth you, heareth Me." (Luke x. 16.)

Though the assent of faith, therefore, is obscure, it is most certain, for it is impossible that God can deceive or be deceived. He is "the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world." (John i. 9.) And is it not most reasonable, even from a human point of view, that God would not ex-

pect every man to find out the truth for himself, but would rather set up an unfailing teacher, learned in the law, to whom all could apply? Else how could the ignorant and the unlearned find out the truth of doctrines which even the learned and the enlightened so much dispute about? In the Holy Catholic Church the most simple and ignorant have motives for their belief in every article of faith which perfectly and most reasonably convince them of the truth of each of them, whilst the learned and the accomplished of other religions are completely without a reliable guide, scarcely any two of them ever believing the same doctrines. The result is seen in the multitude of warring sects we see all around us to-day, "tossed to and fro," as St. Paul says, "and carried about with every wind of doctrine." (Eph. iv. 14.)

If we are blessed with the gift of the true Faith, let us never forget that it is not on account of any merit of ours, but through the mercy and goodness of God to us through the merits of our divine Master Jesus Christ. Hence we should be ever on our guard to foster and preserve this inestimable favor. It may be lost through our own carelessness. We can not expose it to danger with impunity, under the false impression that we can not be shaken

in our belief. It is difficult to convince some people that it is sinful to read books against the Faith, to listen to so-called arguments against the doctrines and practices of the Church. They forget the very essence and nature of faith—that it is not to be got by human or by our own efforts, but that it is "the gift of God" to His children. And the pity of it is that those who are most inclined to read or listen to arguments against their Faith are the very ones who are by nature and education least of all fitted to grasp an argument, to detect a fallacy, or to judge for themselves between conflicting opinions. Perhaps they see brought to life again some old calumny against the Church. It has been exploded hundreds of years ago, but it is new to them. They see the objection, but they can not see the answer, and their faith is weakened. They imagine they have made a discovery. They see a great light dawning on them and they seek for more. They develop a taste for reading such literature and as "the wish is father to the thought" they soon begin to persuade themselves that the laws of the Church are too exacting. They pose as "well-read" men and are anxious to throw off the yoke of authority by which Christ and His Holy Church would bind them to purity and

holiness of life. Then they neglect confession and holy communion, give up hearing Mass on Sundays, omit their morning and night prayers and lead a life of secret sin. They enter into matrimonial alliances which are forbidden by the Church and by God, send their children to Godless schools and bring up, without any thought of the consequences, a brood of heathens. They have lost the gift of faith and no extreme is too much for them, until, like the fool referred to in Holy Scripture, they deny the existence of God altogether. "The fool hath said in his heart: There is no God." (Ps. xiii. 1.)

Let us, then, be careful lest through pride or vain ignorance we lose the precious treasure of faith. Without it we can not be saved, for "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. xi. 6.), impossible to merit the smallest supernatural reward for even the noblest actions. But faith is the foundation of all virtue, and makes all our actions holy and pleasing to God. And as the wicked and the foolish are remarkable for their want of faith, so the good and the wise are found to possess its true spirit, for "the just man liveth by faith." (Rom. i. 17.) The fruits and efficacy of such faith is shown at length by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Hebrews, where he

gives numerous examples of the blessings which flowed from it to God's faithful people. He mentions the examples of Abel, Henoch, Noe, Abraham, and Moses and shows how all these holy men were remarkable for their great faith in Almighty God, in His revelations, commands, and promises. "By faith Moses, when he was grown up," he says, "denied himself to be the son of Pharao's daughter; rather choosing to be afflicted with the people of God than to have the pleasure of sin for a time: esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasure of the Egyptians. For he looked unto the reward." And he concludes by referring to the wonderful effects of a lively faith by which so many "conquered kingdoms, wrought justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions" and found sufferings of every kind for the sake of Christ most agreeable to them. (Heb. xi.)

May God grant us, then, a lively and firm faith. Our fear of losing such a precious gift is a sure sign of its happy possession. Infidels are never troubled by their want of faith, just as dead men do not feel cold, and frozen limbs do not ache. Let us often pray, then, like the man in the Gospel: "I believe, O Lord, help my unbelief" (Mark ix. 23.): or

with the apostles, "Lord, increase our faith." (Luke xvii. 5.) Then we shall increase day by day in the knowledge and love of God and be consoled by the thought of our promised reward when the "day dawn and the day-star shall arise in our hearts" and we shall see God not as "now through a glass in a dark manner; but then face to face." (1 Cor. xiii. 12.)

XXVII

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

A SHEPHERD

"For you were as sheep going astray."
(EPISTLE: 1 Peter ii. 21–25.)

"I am the good shepherd."
(GOSPEL: John x. 11–16.)

IT has been already frequently pointed out to us that it is our duty to imitate our divine Master in everything. But our holy mother the Church, knowing our weakness, also takes account of the fact that we sometimes fail to discharge that duty as we ought. And so, like a loving mother, frequently forgives, admonishes, consoles, and comforts us and encourages us to greater effort. The love of a mother for her child often causes her to overlook its defects and its faults in a manner which seems foolish to the eyes of the casual observer. In like manner does our loving Redeemer deal with us. We are the children of His love. For our sakes He came down from His throne of glory in heaven and sacrificed Himself for our redemption, suffering the

death of the cross, which was "unto the Jews indeed a stumbling-block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness." (1 Cor. i. 23.) But He did more than that, for, as the Epistle says: "Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps," and when we proved ungrateful and went aside from the path of virtue, He still continued to love us, and, as the Gospel of to-day tells us, went after us like a good shepherd and endeavored to bring us back to the true fold of His grace and love. "For you were as sheep going astray: but you are now converted to the shepherd and bishop of your souls."

Though each of the divine attributes is equally perfect; though the justice and the mercy and the goodness of God are each exercised in a perfect manner without detriment to one another, still it seems as if our loving Saviour in His dealings with men allows the attribute of His divine mercy to shine forth in a special manner, so often is it brought under our notice and held up by God Himself for our encouragement and consolation. So Holy Scripture says: "The Lord is sweet to all: and His tender mercies are over all His works." (Ps. cxliv. 9.) He is, of course, a God of justice, but His love for sinful man is so great that He wishes to show Himself to

us as a kind and loving Father, as a merciful Judge, as a charitable Physician who has compassion on all our infirmities. And this was the character which our divine Master assumed when He came on earth to gain the love of men. This was the very foundation of Christ's personality during His life. He was always and ever the gentle, kind, and merciful Jesus, the friend of sinners. Indeed, in His dealings with sinners He was especially loving and merciful, so that he was frequently reproached by the Pharisees for treating them with so much consideration. "This man," they said, "receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." (Luke xv. 2.) He loved to show Himself to them in this gentle and loving character and often told them those numerous consoling and encouraging parables which we find throughout the holy Gospels. At one time He shows Himself as a loving father receiving and pardoning his wayward child, in the story of the Prodigal Son. At another He speaks of Himself as a kind and thoughtful shepherd who leaves ninety-nine sheep in the desert and goes in search of the lost one. (Luke xv.) And in the Gospel of to-day He appears as the "Good Shepherd who giveth His life for His sheep."

For some time past, and especially during

the holy season of Lent, the Church has been asking us to consider the malice of sin, how it offends the divine majesty, and what it has caused the Son of God to suffer in His sacred passion and death. But to-day she speaks to us once more of the love and mercy of God, of His kindness toward poor sinners, of His desire to save them, and of His loving reception of those who sincerely desire to repent. She tells us of Jesus, the loving shepherd of our souls, and in His name and by His authority she calls upon us all, no matter how sinful we may have been in the past, no matter how we have received in vain His many helps for our salvation or neglected the many graces He has offered to us, to return at once to the true fold, to the care and protection of our "Good Shepherd."

The love of God for the human soul is strange and inexplicable. It is a mystery which reason can not penetrate. The great God, all-powerful, all-sufficient for Himself, infinitely happy in Himself from all eternity, deigns to look down upon us His creatures and not only loves us but actually yearns for our love in return! "God first hath loved us," says St. John. (1 John iv. 19.) He loves us with an everlasting love. "The mercy of the Lord is from eternity and unto eternity,"

says the Psalmist (Ps. cii. 17.): and His whole desire is to gain the love of men and to enkindle in their cold hearts the fire of His divine love. "I am come to cast fire on the earth: and what will I but that it be kindled?" says Jesus (Luke xii. 49.), who came on earth for the purpose of even forcing men to love Him. "The charity of Christ presseth us," says St. Paul. (2 Cor. v. 14.) We sin and reject His love, seeking for happiness in the things of earth. He bids us repent and offers us again His love and forgiveness. We wander from the fold of life eternal and seek for pastures where death awaits us. He, like a loving shepherd, calls upon us to return. Nay, He follows and seeks us, striving to lead us back, as if His happiness were dependent upon ours. Truly we may say with holy Job: "What is man that Thou shouldst magnify him? or why dost Thou set Thy heart upon him?" (vii. 17.) Or with the Psalmist: "What is man that Thou art mindful of him? or the son of man that Thou visitest him?" (Ps. viii. 5.) Woe to us if we still continue to turn a deaf ear to all His entreaties. A time may come when we may no longer hear His voice, and then, left to ourselves, we may continue to wander until the wolf comes and devours us: until the devil, who, as St. Peter

says, like "a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter v. 8.), comes and seizes us.

It would be a fatal error, however, to abuse the mercy of God by offending Him in the hope of pardon. "God is not mocked," says St. Paul, "for what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap" (Gal. vi. 7, 8.), for whilst God is infinitely merciful, He is also infinitely just and "His mercy is to them that fear Him." (Luke i. 50.) "After sin, hope for mercy: before sin, fear justice," says St. Augustine. Whilst the sinner who hopes for mercy is advised by the Preacher to have mercy on himself first: "Have pity on thy own soul." (Ecclus. xxx. 24.) And again: "Say not: I have sinned, and what harm hath befallen me? For the Most High is a patient rewarder. Be not without fear about sin forgiven: and add not sin upon sin: And say not: The mercy of the Lord is great, He will have mercy on the multitude of my sins. For mercy and wrath quickly come from Him, and His wrath looketh upon sinners. Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day." (Ecclus. v. 4–8.) When God is so good and merciful as not to punish sinners immediately for their ingratitude they are inclined to become thought-

less and forgetful of Him altogether. "The wicked man when he is come into the depths of sins, contemneth," says Holy Scripture. (Prov. xviii. 3.) But God warns such by the mouth of the Psalmist: "These things hast thou done, and I was silent. Thou thoughtest unjustly that I should be like to thee: but I will reprove thee, and set before thy face." (Ps. xlix. 21, 22.) So the sinner who offends God on account of His mercy and in the hope of pardon is really despising God's mercy and seeking for His hate instead of His love. "And their hope the abomination of the soul" (Job xi. 20.), says Job.

But whilst we still hear the voice of our loving Shepherd calling on us to return to Him it shows that the mercy of God has not yet abandoned us. "The mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed: because His commiserations have not failed" (Lam. iii. 22.), sings the prophet Jeremias. Upon our resolution to-day, then, may depend our happiness or misery for all eternity, for it may be our last chance. Have you wandered from the fold of Christ by wilful sin and have not yet made up your mind to return? Have you been neglecting Mass, omitting your prayers, failing to approach the sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist, or living in any secret sin?

To such Christ speaks to-day as the Good Shepherd calling on them once more to return. He may not ask them again. To these the Church to-day in the name of Christ and by His authority appeals. She implores them to listen to the voice of their Pastor and to be converted to the Shepherd of their souls. Christ Himself promises them mercy and pardon. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways: and why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezech. xxxiii. 11.) And when the Pharisees complained that Jesus was the friend of sinners He answered them by saying: "They that are in health need not a physician, but they that are ill. Go then and learn what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice. For I am not come to call the just, but sinners." (Matt. ix.) Yes, He seems to forget the just in His desire to save sinners, as the good shepherd leaves the ninety-nine sheep apparently neglected and goes in search of his lost one. He offers them His love and forgiveness. He will receive them kindly and rejoice over them if only they will return to Him. He has shed His blood and laid down His life for their salvation—"The good shepherd giveth his life for

his sheep"—and notwithstanding all their ingratitude He still wishes to save them. "Today," then, "if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts," says St. Paul. (Heb. iv. 7.) Even if your sins be many and grievous the mercy of God can cover them all. If your ingratitude is great, the love and forgiveness of Jesus is far greater. He who received the penitent Magdalen, the "sinner of the city" (Luke vii. 37.), forgave the denial of Peter, and promised the bliss of paradise to the thief upon the cross will not reject you. "A contrite and humbled heart, O God, Thou will not despise." (Ps. l. 19.) No matter how many and how great your offenses may have been, sincere repentance will obtain His mercy and pardon. "If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made white as snow: and if they be red as crimson, they shall be white as wool," says the prophet Isaias. (i. 18.) For your benefit He has left to His Church the power of forgiving sins. On the very day of His resurrection He anticipated, as it were, the ingratitude of man and said to His apostles "whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them." Cast yourself, therefore, at the feet of the priest in the holy sacrament of Penance. There you will find the gentleness and the love and the mercy of Christ, and you will give joy

to the angels and saints as well as to your own soul, for, "there shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance." (Luke xv. 10.) There you will find Jesus Himself, the faithful Shepherd of your souls, and He will take you forevermore under His loving care, for "You were as sheep going astray: but you are now converted to the shepherd and bishop of your souls."

XXVIII

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

A PROSPECT

"As strangers and pilgrims."
(EPISTLE: 1 Peter ii. 11–19.)

"Your joy no man shall take from you."
(GOSPEL: John xvi. 16–22.)

IT WAS the custom of our divine Master, whenever He spoke to His disciples about the trials and sufferings in store for them in this life, to remind them of the great happiness reserved for them in the world to come, in order to encourage them to bear with patience and resignation, after His own example, all the crosses and humiliations of their pilgrimage in this world, and so lead them to "mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth." (Col. iii. 2.)

It seems strange at first sight that even after His resurrection, our Blessed Saviour, who had obtained that glorious victory for the happiness of His faithful followers, should promise them only sorrow and disappointment and suffering in this life. "You shall lament and

weep," He said to them, according to the Gospel of to-day. But we can understand what He intended for them from the words of St. Paul in the Epistle, where He explains that during our short life in this world we are only here "as strangers and pilgrims" in a place to which we do not really belong; and from the words of our divine Lord in the Gospel, where He explains that though we shall "lament and weep" in this world it will be only for "a little while" and that afterward we shall possess an eternity of happiness in heaven. "And your joy no man shall take from you."

So does our holy mother the Church deal with us. She "reproves, entreats, rebukes, in all patience and doctrine" (2 Tim. iv. 2.) her faithful children, but she frequently also holds out to us for our encouragement and consolation the cheering prospect of the joys of the world to come. To-day, then, she places before us the thoughts of our eternal happiness in heaven, which we are to enjoy after the labors of this short life are happily ended. She wishes us to look upon ourselves as mere "strangers" in this world, not belonging to it in any sense except as "pilgrims" passing through for the time, because it is the only way to our true home in heaven. "My king-

dom is not of this world" (John xviii. 36.), said Jesus to Pilate; and according to St. John "as He is we also are in this world." (1 John iv. 17.) So we "look for a city that hath foundations; whose builder and maker is God." (Heb. xi. 10.) We are "pilgrims and strangers on the earth and seek a country, a better, a heavenly country, for God hath prepared for us a city." (See Heb. xi.) Thus she encourages us with the same hope which our divine Master infused into the hearts of His disciples when He told them that their journey through this vale of tears to His kingdom in heaven would last only "a little while" and that when they arrived there their sorrow should be turned into joy, compared to which the nature and the period of suffering here would seem as nothing, for, as St. Paul says: "The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that shall be revealed in us." (Rom. viii. 18.)

It would be impossible for any human creature to realize, much less adequately to describe, the joys of the kingdom of heaven, seeing that St. Paul himself, who was miraculously "caught up into paradise, and heard secret words, which it is not granted to man to utter" (2 Cor. xii. 4.), assures us that they far surpass anything that the mind of man

could conceive, and that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him." (1 Cor. ii. 9.) We know the infinite power of the great God—"who alone doth wonderful things." (Ps. lxxi. 18.) We know His infinite love for the souls of men—"which surpasseth all knowledge." (Eph. iii. 19.) And we know that He does everything in a manner worthy of His infinite perfections—"He hath done all things well." (Mark vii. 37.) So it is impossible for us to conceive how wonderful must be the joys of that glorious kingdom where such power, such love and such skill all combine to prepare a place of happiness for the elect.

We can form some imperfect idea of the happiness of heaven from the inspired description by the seraphic pen of St. John in the Apocalypse. The Holy Ghost, condescending to the weakness of human nature, which can only form its conceptions by what it sees around it, describes that land of delights according to the idea of "a holy city, a new Jerusalem"—"And the light thereof was like to a precious stone, even as crystal: and the city itself pure gold, like to clear glass: adorned with all manner of precious stones: and the

street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass: the Lord God Almighty is the Temple thereof, and the Lamb: and the city hath no need of the sun, nor of the moon, to shine in it. For the glory of the Lord hath enlightened it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof. And the gates thereof shall not be shut by day: for there shall be no night there: and a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the streets thereof, and on both sides of the river, was the tree of life for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no curse any more; but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. And they shall see His face: and night shall be no more: because the Lord shall enlighten them: and they shall reign for ever and ever." (Apoc. xxi, xxii.)

All these delights, however, are overshadowed and surpassed by the enjoyment of the ineffable sweetness of the divine Presence, which is infinite and eternal happiness in itself altogether indescribable. There, "face to face" with the great God Himself, St. John saw "a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and tribes, and peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne, and in sight of the Lamb, clothed with white robes,

and palms in their hands. And they cried with a loud voice, saying: Salvation to our God, who sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb. . . . Amen. Benediction, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, honor, and power, and strength to our God for ever and ever. Amen." (Apoc. vii. 9–12.)

And when St. John asked who these blessed spirits were, he was answered: "These are they who are come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb." They were the holy martyrs who had suffered for the sake of Christ. Not merely those who had actually shed their blood for the faith of Christ or for some Christian virtue, but also the glorious company of all those whose life upon earth was one of sorrow and of trial, but who bore everything for the love of their divine Master Jesus Christ. Those who had struggled with poverty, sickness, death, and disaster, who had suffered from persecution, misrepresentation, misunderstanding, and calumny, from injury and shame brought upon them by enemies or by deceitful friends, whose eyes in life were filled with tears and whose hearts were bowed down in sorrow. But now they are enjoying the fulfilment of all the promises of God. "And it shall come to pass

in that day," says Isaias, "that when God shall give thee rest from thy labor, and from thy vexation, and from the hard bondage, wherewith thou didst serve before, thou shalt take up this parable against the king of Babylon [by which he means the world] and say: How is the oppressor come to nothing, the tribute hath ceased? The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, the rod of the rulers, that struck the people in wrath with an incurable wound, that brought nations under in fury, that persecuted in a cruel manner. The whole earth is quiet and still, it is glad and hath rejoiced." (xiv. 4–7.) "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more, for the former things are passed away," says St. John. (Apoc. xxi. 4.) The night of this dark and dreary world has gone and the eternal day has dawned for them, for "night shall be no more." How true were those consoling words of our divine Master Himself in His sermon on the mount: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their

fill. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for My sake: be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven." (Matt. v. 3–11.) Now they "have a right to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city." (Apoc. xxii. 14.)

How short and transitory must this short life now appear to those blessed spirits! How slight must their sufferings for Christ now appear to them! How light and ill-performed their labors! How false and fleeting the empty pleasures of the world! As the Psalmist says: "As the dream of them that awake, O Lord; so in Thy city Thou shalt bring their image to nothing." (lxxii. 20.) No wonder, then, that Jesus warned His disciples about attaching themselves to the world or caring much for either its joys or sorrows. "You shall lament and weep," He said to them, "but the world shall rejoice." Which means, according to the holy Fathers, that nothing can be more inconsistent with the hap-

piness of the next life than the happiness of this world. Otherwise their divine Master would have given His disciples riches, power, and pleasure. But He promised them instead trials and sufferings, mourning and weeping. And what was good for them is good for us, and what was dangerous for them is dangerous for us. Hence we should never fix our thoughts upon the pleasures of life but rather on the goods of heaven, for nothing is more destructive of the love of God in the soul than the inordinate love of pleasure. "Love not the world," says St. John, "nor the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in Him." (1 John ii. 15.) How foolish it is, then, to set our hearts on what can never make us happy, but which on the contrary leads to everlasting misery.

Let us, therefore, remember the words of Solomon, who, amidst all the riches and pleasures of this life "saw in all things vanity, and vexation of mind, and that nothing was lasting under the sun" (Eccles. ii. 11.), and look forward to something more noble and lasting and more worthy of our vocation as children of God. Let us bear for "a little while" the sorrows of this life: let us despise its fleeting pleasures and "wait for the coming of our

Lord Jesus Christ, who also will confirm you unto the end" (1 Cor. i. 7, 8.), in the everlasting enjoyment of His blessed company in the kingdom of heaven, for "your joy no man shall take from you."

XXIX

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

A CERTAINTY

"Receive the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls."

(EPISTLE: James i. 17–21.)

"He shall not speak of Himself."

(GOSPEL: John xvi. 5–14.)

THE greatest source of encouragement, strength, and consolation in our work as laborers in the vineyard of the Lord is the absolute certainty with which we are guided in our efforts, the explicit directions we receive, and the powerful assistance of the Master Himself in His grace and presence abiding with us. Others must be in doubt and uncertainty as to their duties toward God, their neighbors, and themselves, and the means of attaining salvation, for their so-called teachers neither claim nor possess any more sense of true direction than the Pharisees, of whom Our Lord said: "They are blind and leaders of the blind." (Matt. xv. 14.) But we know that we have not only a divine and infallible guide as to relations with Almighty God in

the teachings and precepts of Holy Church, but also the efficacious means of salvation in the grace of the Holy Spirit purchased for us by the merits of Jesus Christ.

When the time for Our Saviour's departure from this world was drawing near, He often spoke to His disciples about the arrangements about to be made for their assistance and direction after He should have left them to ascend to His heavenly Father. He encouraged them to ask Him questions about the matter, for He could see that they were distressed and anxious about the nature and success of their future procedure in His absence. Thus in the Gospel of to-day we are told: "Jesus said to His disciples: I go to Him that sent Me, and none of you asketh Me: Whither goest Thou? But because I have spoken these things to you, sorrow hath filled your heart." He soon relieved their doubts, however, and consoled them in their distress by relating to them the divine arrangements for sending the Holy Ghost, the Paraclete or Comforter, to be with them after He Himself had ascended into heaven. "It is expedient for you that I go," He said, "for if I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you: but if I go, I will send Him to you." And He explained some of the wonderful effects which the coming of the

Holy Spirit would produce in the world and in themselves. He was to convince the world of the sin of the Jews in their treatment of the Redeemer; of the divinity and merits of Jesus, by which alone we can be justified; and of the authority of the mission of redemption which Christ had received from His eternal Father. By that authority He had already overthrown the kingdom of Satan and had established the reign of truth and holiness on the ruins of paganism and infidelity by His life, death, and resurrection. And now the Holy Spirit was to continue the good work and convince the world of the truth of the Christian religion by inspiring the disciples who were to preach it with an infallible knowledge of its doctrines —"He will teach you all truth"—with a fearlessness and self-sacrifice born of the power of God, with the gifts of "the spirit of wisdom, and of understanding, the spirit of counsel, and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge, and of godliness, and . . . the spirit of the fear of the Lord." (Isaias xi. 2, 3.)

But what our divine Master wished above all to impress upon His disciples was that which gave to their continuation of His labors its chief value; namely, the divine authority for the truth of their doctrines and of their mission to preach and teach them. In other

words, He wished to convince every one of the infallible *certainty of the Word of God.*

We saw earlier in the year some of the proofs of the divine character and authority of this holy Word in the wonderful effects it produced. A few weeks before Lent (Sixth Sunday after Epiphany), in the parable of the grain of mustard-seed, we saw its effects on the world in general; how, insignificant though it might seem in itself, it spread over the world with marvelous rapidity in spite of the opposition of its persecutors, of the nature of its doctrines, and of the humble character of its propagators. Shortly afterward (Sexagesima Sunday), in the parable of the sower of the good seed, we saw its effects on individual holiness and the necessity of preparing good soil for its reception by receiving it in the proper spirit and with the necessary dispositions. To-day we are shown by the statements of Christ in the Gospel the foundation of its great value in the authority of His Eternal Father: by the words of St. James in the Epistle of its unchangeable character, as immutable as God Himself, from whom we receive it as a "perfect gift, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no change, nor shadow of alteration," in virtue of which He has begotten us as His spiritual

children; and, finally, of its wonderful efficacy in actually obtaining for us the salvation of our souls, if we receive it in a proper manner. "Wherefore," says the Epistle, "casting away all uncleanness and abundance of naughtiness, with meekness receive the ingrafted word which is able to save your souls."

As Our Lord Jesus Christ was so anxious to convince His followers of the divine authority for everything, He "began to do and to teach, until the day on which, giving commandments by the Holy Ghost to the apostles whom He had chosen, He was taken up" (Acts i. 1, 2.), so there is nothing so clear and consistent as the multitude of the proofs of it in Holy Scripture, tradition, and the writings of the Fathers. History, both sacred and profane, is full of the most remarkable miracles performed by Jesus. He changed water into wine, calmed the stormy sea, fed five thousand with a few loaves, cured the sick, the blind, and the lame, and raised the dead to life. So He could truly say: "The works that I do in the name of My Father, they give testimony of Me." (John x. 25.) Moreover, He fulfilled in His own person to the very letter all the ancient prophecies concerning the Messias—the time and circumstances of His coming, His birth, His life, His char-

acter, His passion and death, His very name and title, His mission, His establishment of the Church, His sacrifice of the New Law and His resurrection, so clearly and definitely foretold by Himself also shortly before His death. Those miracles were continued in a most remarkable manner by His apostles and disciples, as He had promised them they should be when He said: "Believe you not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? Otherwise believe for the very works' sake. Amen, amen I say to you, he that believeth in Me, the works that I do, he also shall do: and greater than these shall he do." (John xiv. 11, 12.) And so, "they going forth preached everywhere: the Lord working withal, and confirming the word with signs that followed" (Mark xvi. 20.), says St. Mark, and we read in the Acts of the Apostles that when St. Peter preached his first sermon after the descent of the Holy Ghost "there were added in that day about three thousand souls. And they were persevering in the doctrine of the apostles, and in the communication of the breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: many wonders also and signs were done by the apostles in Jerusalem, and there was great fear in all." (Acts ii. 41–43.)

But the greatest miracle of all was the marvelous establishment of the Christian religion itself, so rapid, so universal, and so lasting in its character; so victorious over the innumerable difficulties in its way, particularly over the cruel and systematic persecutions of the most powerful rulers organized against its followers, as a result of which all its original propagators were, without exception, put to death. Such a religion could never have been handed down to us in all its integrity without the special intervention of Divine Providence. No wonder, then, that in all ages and in all nations thousands upon thousands of holy martyrs have sealed their faith in their blood, and that such a religion has produced such immense numbers of its children who have been renowned for their sanctity in all ages, and has changed the whole face of the earth.

Well could our divine Master say to His apostles, then, before He gave them the formal commission to preach and teach His doctrines, that He possessed the necessary power. He had already promised to found an infallible Church when He said to St. Peter: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matt. xvi. 18.) And He fulfilled His promise when He said to the eleven:

"All power is given to Me in heaven and in earth. Going, therefore, teach ye all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." (Matt. xxviii. 18–20.) He was to be with them for all time, not visibly and in person, for He was to ascend to His Heavenly Father, but in His Divine Spirit which was to come upon them and dwell with them forever, inwardly directing and inspiring all their thoughts and actions and "teaching them all truth"; for "there are three who give testimony in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost. And these three are one." (1 John v. 7.) And as He was so careful as to quote the authority of His Heavenly Father for the truth of His doctrines, so He refers even the authority of the Holy Spirit to the same divine source: "For He shall not speak of Himself," He says in to-day's Gospel.

We are fortunately blessed, then, in having so reliable and certain a guide in the affair of our eternal salvation as the infallible and unchangeable Word of God Himself, "with whom there is no change nor shadow of alter-

ation." That same divine Word is still given to us by the successors of Christ and the apostles, the pastors of the Church, with the same unchanging and unchangeable lessons and the same divine authority, so that, as St. Paul says, "though we, or an angel from heaven, preach a gospel to you besides that which we have preached to you, let him be anathema." (Gal. i. 8.)

And it has still the same power as it had when Christ and the apostles first preached it, for "our faith stands not on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God." (1 Cor. ii. 5.) But, alas, what good has it accomplished for us? What effects has it produced in our souls who have heard it so often and for whom it can do so much? As often as we hear a sermon or an instruction from God's chosen ministers, so often does the Holy Spirit offer to our minds pious thoughts and good inspirations. But we have apparently rejected them. Well may be said to us what St. Stephen said to the Jews: "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Ghost." (Acts vii. 51.) Let us, then, in the future be more attentive to the voice of the Holy Spirit when we hear the Word of God. Let us be more faithful in the discharge of the duties it points

out to us, for it is a most powerful means of grace and holiness unto salvation. "Wherefore, casting away all uncleanness and abundance of naughtiness, with meekness receive the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls."

XXX

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

A MIRROR

"He beheld himself, and went his way."
(EPISTLE: James i. 22–27.)

"If you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you."
(GOSPEL: John xvi. 23–30.)

TWO VERY remarkable helps to salvation are made specially prominent in Holy Scripture, and our attention has been frequently drawn to each of them by Holy Church at various intervals throughout the year. One, as we saw last Sunday, is the holy Word of God: and the other is Prayer. To-day we are shown how they mutually assist and depend upon each other, and how necessary they are as means of eternal salvation.

We are told in the Epistle that it is not enough merely to hear the Word of God; we must also make practical application to our own souls of the advice which it gives and the lessons which it teaches. That it is, as it were, a mirror in which we see reflected faithfully

the exact state of our conscience, with all our merits and defects. These defects it is our duty to correct; otherwise we "shall be compared to a man beholding his own countenance in a mirror. For he beheld himself, and went his way, and presently forgot what manner of man he was."

In the Gospel we are shown that the only way to correct our faults is to pray for the necessary light and grace to observe and amend them. And that Christ Himself has expressly promised that our prayers shall infallibly be heard. "If you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you."

The great cause of the neglect of prayer, and of prayer without the proper dispositions, and consequently the chief cause of the loss of so many souls, is the want of consideration on the truths of eternity, which causes ignorance or forgetfulness of the laws of God and His Church, and of our obligations to know, love, and serve our Creator. This is the reason assigned by Almighty God Himself for the ruin of souls, for He says by the mouth of His prophet: "With desolation is all the land made desolate, because there is none that considereth in the heart." (Jer. xii. 11.) Men are so much taken up with the world and its vanities that, as Jesus Himself said on one

occasion, though the good seed of God's Word may be sown in their hearts, "they are choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this world, and yield no fruit." (Luke viii. 14.) That is, they do not seriously enough meditate on the truths of the Gospel and act according to their teaching.

It is a mistake to imagine that such consideration, or meditation, on the eternal truths is a spiritual exercise reserved for those who have specially consecrated their lives to the service of God in the religious state. It is quite clear both from reason itself, and from the teaching and example of Christ, that mental prayer, or meditation, is morally necessary for all the faithful without exception, because if they do not frequently reflect on the great affair of salvation they will not see the obstacles to it, or be aware of the obligations they must fulfil in order to be saved, much less see their shortcomings and take measures to correct them, by praying for the necessary light and grace. Those who do not frequently meditate have, therefore, very little light to see their faults and very little strength to mend them. So Our Lord advises us: "Let your loins be girt, and lamps burning in your hands." (Luke xii. 35.) According to St. Bonaventure, these lamps are holy meditations in which

God enlightens us as to the spiritual needs of our souls.

Our divine Master teaches us the very same principle. On one occasion, for example, He said to His disciples, who had been very busy: "Come apart into a desert place, and rest a little." (Mark vi. 31.) By which He meant that they were to lay aside for a time the pursuit of the works of mercy in which they had been engaged, and refresh their souls by undisturbed conversation with Almighty God; for it is only when our hearts are alone with God that He speaks to us, as the prophet gives us to understand when he says: "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and will lead her into the wilderness: and I will speak to her heart." (Osee ii. 14.)

By His own divine example also He proved the truth of this principle. He often went aside from the multitude and spent whole nights in prayer. "And having dismissed the multitude, He went into a mountain alone to pray. And when it was evening, He was there alone," says St. Matthew. (xiv. 23.) While St. Luke tells us that He spent whole nights in prayer: "He went out into a mountain to pray, and he passed the whole night in the prayer of God." (vi. 12.) According to St. Ambrose, if Christ thus spent whole nights

in prayer for our salvation, how much more ought we to pray for ourselves!

It is important, therefore, that we should frequently "think in the heart" on the great affair of our eternal salvation. "Blessed is the man," says the Psalmist, "whose will is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he shall meditate day and night." (Ps. i. 1, 2.) Esdras, though "he was a ready scribe in the law," went up to Jerusalem, having "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord and to do the commandments and judgment." (1 Esdras vii. 6–10.) So should we, with a willing heart and with the other necessary dispositions, seek the law of the Lord and make ourselves acquainted with its precepts by devoutly hearing the Word of God whenever we have the opportunity. There, as in a mirror, we shall see the defects of our souls. But it is not enough to see them, we must endeavor to correct them. Lest we "forget what manner of man we are," we must seriously weigh and examine them in holy meditation and self-examination. And thus we shall deal honestly with ourselves and be "doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving ourselves."

And when by serious reflection in the light of God's holy Word we find out our obligations and see wherein we fail in our duty to

God, our neighbor, or ourselves, what are we to do in order to make up for our shortcomings? Of ourselves we can do nothing. "Without Me," says Christ, "you can do nothing." (John xv. 5.) The answer is given by Our Lord Himself in to-day's Gospel. He will not only show us clearly our duty, and point out our defects—"I will no more speak to you in proverbs, but will shew you plainly of the Father"—but He will also give us all the graces and assistance necessary, if we only ask in prayer. "You shall ask in My name," He says: and "if you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you."

This promise of Christ is the foundation and chief value of prayer. Without the promise that our prayers shall be heard, we might indeed pray, but we could never be sure that our requests would be granted. Since Christ, however, expressly made the promise, it follows that when we pray we must be heard. God can not refuse us. But then there are certain conditions. In the first place, we must pray in the name of Jesus Christ; that is, we must acknowledge that the value and infallible efficacy of our prayer depend on the merits and intercession of our Blessed Redeemer, who earned for us the privilege of ob-

taining whatever is necessary for salvation by merely asking our Heavenly Father for it. From which naturally follows another condition; namely, that we ask for something which is conducive to our spiritual welfare. This includes such spiritual blessings as the forgiveness of our sins, the light to see our faults, the spirit of faith and of charity; and also such temporal blessings as may be necessary for us to discharge the duties of our state in life according to the holy will of God. "All [these] things whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive." (Matt. xxi. 22.) But as for riches, prosperity, success, and such like temporal favors, they were never promised, nor have we any right to ask for them, except in so far as they may be necessary or conducive to our spiritual welfare, of which God alone is the best judge.

But it may be said, as Christ Himself said, "Your Father knoweth what is needful for you before you ask Him." (Matt. vi. 8.) Why, then, does He not grant us all that we need for salvation without asking Him? It is enough to know that God has willed otherwise for His own wise reasons. If He were to bestow upon us all the graces we required without asking for them, there would be grave danger of our abuse of them. Besides, we

should never know our wants, never realize our failings and our weaknesses, soon forget God and His holy law and become strangers to spiritual discipline. God would be forced, as it were, to save us in spite of ourselves, and so we should lose all merit and free will. If we do not ask, then, we shall not receive. But if we ask in the proper manner we shall infallibly, through the merits of Christ, obtain all the graces we need. "In everything," therefore, "by prayer and supplication, let your petitions be made known to God." (Philippians iv. 6.)

It is our duty, then, to "hear the word of God, and keep it." We must meditate on it frequently—"Let not the book of this law depart from thy mouth: but thou shalt meditate on it day and night, that thou mayst observe and do all things that are written in it: then shalt thou direct thy way, and understand it" (Josue i. 8.), says Holy Scripture. And we must give ourselves to constant prayer also, for it is of no use to find out our wants by meditation if we do not obtain the relief of them by prayer. Hence our divine Master tells us that "we ought always to pray and not to faint." (Luke xviii. 1.)

Fortunately our holy mother the Church places within our reach a most excellent, a

most easy, and a most fruitful means of accomplishing all that is contained in this twofold duty by the institution of the devotion of the Most Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin. This is a method of mental prayer suitable alike to young and old, to the learned and to the ignorant, to the saint as well as to the sinner. In its fifteen "mysteries" are brought before us the principal scenes in the lives of Our Lord Jesus Christ and His holy Mother, with the many lessons and principles contained therein. It is a compendium of meditations on Holy Scripture which gives rise to holy thoughts and pious inspirations at the same time as it places on our lips the very form of prayer composed by our divine Master Himself and by His Holy Church in the "Our Father" and "Hail Mary" so often repeated. For it is not necessary to speak much when we pray. "When you are praying," says St. Matthew, "speak not much, as the heathens. For they think that in their much speaking they may be heard." (vi. 7.) Say the Rosary with devotion every day. By the intercession of Jesus and His blessed Mother we shall obtain light to know ourselves as we really are and the grace to serve our divine Master faithfully and well. Thus we shall "be doers of the word and not hearers only."

By the contemplation of the events of the birth, passion and death of Our Redeemer our blessed Mother will obtain for us the grace of His love and the grace of His spirit of prayer, by which our salvation will be secured and our joy be made full.

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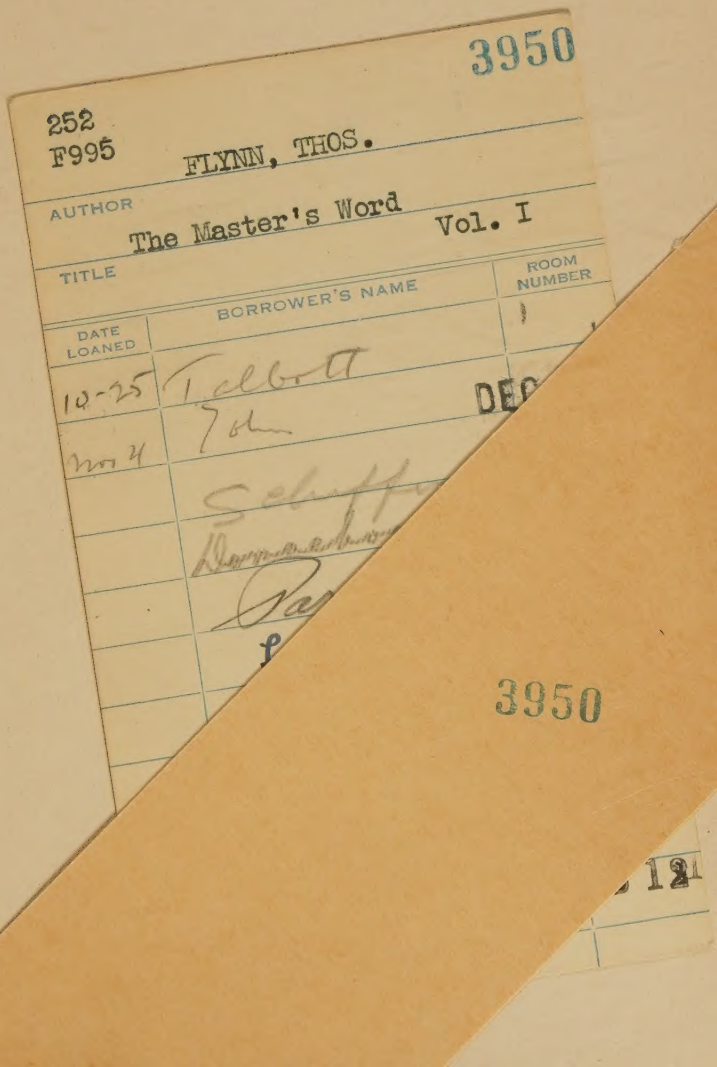
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